

# TEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

---

## FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

CHRIST, ABEL, AND MELCHIZEDEK  
— *Raymond Panikkar*

THE REVELATIONAL IN RELIGION  
— *Robley Whitson*

TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN THE MODERN WORLD  
— *Thomas Berry*

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND RELIGIOUS LANGUAGES  
— *Antonio T. de Nicolas*

THE SPIRIT AND ORIENTATION OF AN INDIAN THEOLOGY  
— *John B. Chethimattam*

BULLETIN: BRIEF SURVEY ON THE ACTUAL WORKING AND  
FUTURE ORIENTATION OF ECUMENISM  
— *John B. Chethimattam*

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Editorial	389
Christ, Abel. and Melchizedek	
— <i>Raymond Panikkar</i>	391
The Revelational in Religion	
— <i>Robley Whitson</i>	404
Traditional Religion in the Modern World	
— <i>Thomas Berry</i>	422
Religious Experience and Religious Languages	
— <i>Antonio T. de Nicolas</i>	435
The Spirit and Orientation of an Indian Theology	
— <i>John B. Chethimattam</i>	452
Bulletin: Brief Survey on the Actual Working and Future Orientation of Ecumenism	
— <i>John B. Chethimattam</i>	463

---

### IN THE NEXT ISSUE

#### THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Basic Perspectives of Christian Spiritualities	
— <i>George Punchekunnel</i>	
Christian Spirituality, Yesterday and Today	
— <i>Finbar Connolly</i>	
The Experience of Prayer	
— <i>Samuel Rayan</i>	
Bible as the Source of Christian Life	
— <i>C. M. Cherian</i>	
A Dynamic Approach to Spiritual Life	
— <i>George Puthumana</i>	
Basic Trends in Modern Hindu Spirituality	
— <i>Swami Siddhinathananda</i>	
Book Reviews	

# JEEVADHARA

— A Journal of Christian Interpretation —

1. Jeevadhara is a monthly journal published in January-February, March-April, May-June, July-August, September-October, and November-December.
  2. The Editorial Board does not necessarily endorse the contents of the journal.
  3. Subscriptions are payable in advance and should be sent to the Managing Editor, Jeevadhara, P.O. Box No. 1, Alway.
  4. Exchange books for review and review should be submitted to—  
The General Editor, Jeevadhara, P.O. Box No. 1, Alway.
- For further information, please write to the Managing Editor, Jeevadhara.

## Subscription Rates:

India:	Rs. 10/- (Annual)
Foreign:	Rs. 15/- (Annual)
Single:	Rs. 2/- (1/2 & 1/4)

OF THE MANAGING EDITOR

## To the Notice of Readers & Subscribers:-

1. Jeevadhara is a bi-monthly published in January-February, March-April, May-June, July-August, September-October, and November-December.
2. The Editorial Board does not necessarily endorse the individual views of contributors.
3. Subscriptions are payable in advance and must be sent to:-  
The Manager, Jeevadhara, Post Bag No. 6, Alleppey.  
Inland subscriptions are best sent by M. O.
4. Exchanges, books for reviews, and queries should be addressed to:-  
The General Editor, Jeevadhara, Post Bag No. 6, Alleppey.  
But articles for publication may be sent to the respective Section Editors.

## Subscription Rates :-

Indian:	Rs	12/-	(Malayalam Edition)
	Rs	15/-	(English Edition)
Foreign:	\$	6/-	(U. S. A.)
			or its equivalent abroad.

N. B. Air surcharge, if required, will be extra.



# The Meeting of Religions

## FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

Editor :

John B. Chethimattam

Theology Centre,  
Alleppey,  
Kerala, India.

# JEEVADHARA

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Constantine Manalel (General Editor)

Raymond Panikkar	K. Luke
John B. Chethimattam	Samuel Rayan
C. M. Cherian	Xavier Koodapuzha
Cyril Malamcharuvil	Cyriac Kanichai
Werner Chakalakal	Sebastian Kappen
John Arakkal	George Puthumana
Cleopatra Konikkara	P. T. Chacko
Joseph Thayil	Kuriakose Parampath
Mathew Vellanickal	Felix Podimattam
Paul Puthanangady	George Mangatt
Thomas Aykara	Thomas Mampira
George Punchakunnel	Scaria Nedumthacady
Ignatius Puthiadam	Mathias Mundadan
C. A. Sheppard (Literary Editor)	Swami Vikrant

## SECTION EDITORS

P. T. Chacko:	THE PROBLEM OF MAN
K. Luke:	THE WORD OF GOD
Samuel Rayan:	THE LIVING CHRIST
Xavier Koodapuzha:	THE PEOPLE OF GOD
John B. Chethimattam:	THE MEETING OF RELIGIONS
Joseph Thayil:	THE FULLNESS OF LIFE

# Editorial

It is hardly a decade since Vatican II gave out its decree on Ecumenism. Within this short period the Ecumenical Movement has radically changed its own orientation. It has grown in strength. But in the restricted sense of a dialogue between the Christian Churches it is at a dead end. Perhaps it has succeeded too well in its activities. There remain very few doctrinal issues that divide the Christian Churches. Yet it is rather difficult to predict any foreseeable date when there will be only one Christian Church in the world. This is an age of freedom and pluralism. Individual Christian Churches hold their individual autonomy too dear to allow it to be modified in the union of all Churches into one Church. On the other hand the very meaning of Ecumenism is being challenged by the new thinkers who question the unity of the Bible, the unity of Revelation centred in Christ, and the unity of the Church itself. Ecumenism has grown to such a point that it cannot thrive in its self-imposed limitations. It can study the problems of the Bible, Revelation and the Church meaningfully only in the context of the encounter of religions in God's plan of salvation for all men.

So we have planned this number of *Jeevadhara* in this wider sense of Ecumenism. Raymond Panikkar examines the meaning and role of the non-Abrahamic religions in the divine economy of salvation in the light of certain statements of Vatican II in its declaration on the non-Christian religions. Robley Whitsan follows the same line of thought and explores the Revelational element in non-Christian religions, picking out Buddhism and Confucianism for examples. Revelation has to be redefined if the salvational factor in the so-called non-Christian religions is to be fully taken into account.

Thomas Berry turns his attention to another aspect of the ecumenical dialogue, namely the meaning and function of religions in our secular age. Antonio T. de Nicolas on the other hand



Taking its lead from the spirit of the Council, our commentary will not merely restate what that Declaration says but will seek to lay bare the lines which the conciliar text seems to consider fundamental for a *theology of religions*.

The first thing that must be said is that by contrast with the rest of the Council's pronouncements, and particularly with the pronouncements of other Councils, this one impresses the reader as the opening bar to a piece of music rather than the closing one. And yet—here comes the second point at once—the text under consideration breaks new ground altogether with form and content alike. Indeed the state of affairs does seem unprecedented, as the Declaration intimates by its opening words: it is a burning issue in our times: *nostra aetate*.

Both for christians, who thanks to the political events and technological advances achieved by others, no longer regard them as "barbarians", "infidels", "heathens", "natives", or "savages", and for those others, who have entered the concert of mankind as equals, the state of affairs is unheard of in practically every respect. Men have studied the problem thoroughly enough (though without always finding the existential solution) for us to turn it over in our minds. The *kairos* of "our age" is precisely this: that for the first time in history our world can now achieve unity on a global scale.

In the third place, although limited to number two of the Declaration, our commentary will bring out the fact that from beginning to end the conciliar text utters no condemnation of the religions of the world but instead makes a considerable effort to understand them and to find some basis for cooperation among the various religious traditions of mankind. Not only does it utter no anathema; on the contrary, it seems to bless God for not deserting his children but providing them with diverse roads to salvation "through Christ Our Lord": *per Christum Dominum nostrum*.

Number two of the Declaration consists of three parts, and the problems we shall go into are also three. The first has to do with the outline of a theology of religions that the Council



hints at; the second, with relations between the Church and the religions of mankind, a subject almost totally new; and the third, with the attitude of Catholics towards the religions of mankind.

Let us add that we shall try to make this commentary a real one – that is, one setting forth what the text brings to our remembrance (*cum miniscor*) and what it suggests to our minds (*cum mentus sum*). This, in the present case, would likewise seem to point in the direction being taken by christian thought and living nowadays.

Needless to say, our commentary neither dispenses anyone from reading the text, which it does not merely rehearse, nor does it set up as having any more authority than that carried by the ideas it develops.

A further general remark also seems to be in order: we quite deliberately approach our subject from the point of view of historical christianity: we hope that our reflections may lead the christian thinkers of our day towards a deeper, more sympathetic understanding of the world's religions. In short we would like to contribute towards an enlargement of christian awareness today. On the other hand we make no attempt to deal with our subject in terms that are meaningful for the other religious traditions of mankind. That would not only call for a different language but also for a background of different concepts and different myths. Although the name of Christ is held to be universal, and Abel and Melchizedek did not live under the covenant of circumcision, they all do belong to the Semitic tradition. For instance this study with a view to establishing the dialogue would have to start by changing its title to some such one as *The Son of Man, Prophet and Priest*. But before we embark on building the arch we must with forbearance, meekness, and constancy strengthen the pillars on which it is to rest.

## 1. The Religions

*Sic . . religiones, quae per totum mundum inveniuntur, inquietudini cordis hominum variis modis occurrere nituntur proponendo vias, doctrinas scilicet ac praecepta vitae necnon ritus sacros.*<sup>3</sup>

*Nostra Aetate, 2.*

A glance at the acts of the Councils, indeed at almost any book of systematic theology, ancient or modern, suffices to prove that, down to our own day, christian theology, and the self awareness of the Church even more, have been very little more than a sort of meditation turned inwards, though certainly one of the utmost value. In other words theology was considered to be a methodical thinking over what are known as the data of revelation, conducted by bringing into play more or less critically such ideas as men's minds were able to grasp at any given period. In a word, for the first twenty centuries of her existence the Church can be said to have been preoccupied with understanding herself and setting forth her own doctrines, not making any sustained effort to understand others. This preoccupation emerges from the evolution of catholic theology and even more palpably from the Church's attitude towards the missions, above all for the last few hundred years. To any unrationalistic mind the first thing needful for teaching 'Gopal' Sanskrit is not to know Sanskrit but to know 'Gopal'. The Church has taken pains to know the Gospel and live by it, even to explain it to others, but until our own day has not seen any particular need to know 'Gopal'. Hence the misunderstandings that have often arisen: the preacher has meant to preach one thing; but not being really familiar with the cultural background of his hearers, he has actually been taken to be preaching something totally different.

- 
- (3) Likewise, other religions to be found all over the world strive variously to meet the restless searchings of the human heart by proposing *ways*, which consist of doctrines, rules of life, and sacred rituals.

Were we to study the history of spirituality in terms of social psychology we would discover the same pattern of growth there that is to be found in any adolescent, who for the sake of his survival and well-being must primarily concentrate on himself, grappling with a certain problem of identity. The Jesus-event so worked upon men that it has taken little short of twenty centuries to achieve what we elsewhere call a theandric synthesis, fitting into the natural order what hitherto passed for supernatural. A largely eschatological view of things, which rejected the world, despised the body, and belittled "merely human" values, has at length turned into a spirituality which seeks to blend the two poles of christian living, the natural and the supernatural. Theoretically those two poles were always there but in fact they never reached the proper balance. Indeed our age has still not managed to find it. Here we may well have the fact that accounts for the one-sided behaviour in our day of secularism and even of what people call atheism. However that may be, the Declaration we are commenting on seems to us to breathe the very spirit to which reference has been made: an outgoing towards the other man, a change from self-preoccupation (with the danger of narcissism which that involves) to an attitude of mind that stands open to all influences, whatever their source.

The historian of religions might say that on the whole the various religions of mankind have hitherto lived in a kind of splendid isolation from christianity, having hardly any dealings with it apart from the skirmishes attending such conquests or conversions as have taken place from time to time over the centuries.

What gives our document its quite exceptional weight is the fact that in it for the first time, so far as can be gathered, the Church explicitly, officially, and solemnly deals with the subject of other religions, the fact of them and the purpose they serve. Falling in with the pastoral spirit of the Council from beginning to end, the Church here takes the trouble to make 'Gopal's' acquaintance before turning her whole attention to her own doctrine. Aware, moreover, that christian faith cannot exist disembodied and therefore must appear in dress of



some sort, she now seems for the first time to envisage the possibility of that faith's wearing different sorts of dress from the one of Mediterranean fashion which it has always been accustomed to wear – a further witness to the new age which this Council ushers in and sets its seal upon.

Not only with the subjects it treats of – the world, the means of social communication, the religions of the world and so forth – but also and especially with its actual teaching, this Council breaks new ground. It does not anathematize the world; it does not condemn freedom; it gives us a pithy and entirely positive appreciation of the world's religions. Although some had asked that without prejudice to truth undesirable features of those religions should also be brought out, that was not done, and for a reason which strikes us as telling. The Church's attitude is no mere stratagem for ingratiating herself with the other religions but something far weightier: she looks on *the religions of the world as paths to salvation* for the men who go along them in good faith. We shall explore this idea in our first section.

Expounding the conciliar text in the sense we uphold presents no difficulties at all. If every religion claims to be a path to salvation (however that be understood) and the Declaration speaks so favorably of the religions of the world as such, one can hardly deny that they are commended as *religions* and not simply for their minor or incidental features. In other words, those religions are genuine religions, a thing they could not be unless they did the job that makes them religions. The conciliar text does not try to praise the religions for their artistic beauty or their cultural value (a thing which would be none of the Church's business); it praises them for what makes them truly religions, for being each of them what every religion claims to be – a road to salvation.

The underlying theological grounds for this attitude seem perfectly simple. If God wishes all men to be saved and the wish is not a mere velleity, then it follows that God offers all human beings a *normal* opportunity to gain salvation. Now the religions of the world claim to do precisely that, neither

more nor less. If they do not serve that purpose, they serve no purpose at all.

This set of ideas (which we have worked out more fully elsewhere) leads the mind to consider the basis for a real *religious pluralism*, which may well turn out to be one of the most pressing issues facing a future Vatican III.

The Council brought about a change of scene in the Church's life by setting its seal upon an idea that already had advocates in some quarters and was glimmering in many more but had not yet won any such public ecclesiastical approval. We mean the idea that acceptance of cultural pluralism as legitimate must entail the same acceptance of philosophic and theological pluralism. In theory men had always recognized that christian faith did not stand or fall with any particular form of culture. To maintain that it did would amount to preaching Pelagianism, making "grace" dependent on mere "nature". But in practice, since christian faith embodied almost exclusively in religious forms sprung from the jewish and the Mediterranean world, it became increasingly difficult to sift what was "essential" to the christian message from what was "accidental". The very terms in which christian men put the problem reflect a pattern of mind which falls very far short of being universal. At all events, nowadays certainly no one holds any longer that the christian faith cannot do without a given philosophy or theology; it is recognized that faith can express itself in more than one philosophical and theological view of man and of things at large. When it comes to actual cases, of course, the matter still calls for much clarification; and many of the difficulties, perhaps nine out of ten of them, which face christian countries arise from the difficulty, real or supposed, of conveying christian values in terms other than those which men call traditional—at times very short-sightedly.

There is a new problem which we think not only serious (since it brings out the universal character of the christian faith) but pressing besides (since it effects a true meeting among the religions of the world, the necessary foundation for world-wide understanding and peace, for in the last analysis the culture of a people draws its sustenance from the religion of that people).

This problem is the vindication of *religious pluralism*: the acknowledgement of each world religion's status and role in a theology that shall be genuinely catholic – that is, universal. To put the matter in traditional language, we must find out the place (including the *locus theologicus*) of mankind's religions in the christian economy of salvation. This idea cannot be properly worked out in the present article; it calls for something more than a commentary. Nevertheless in view of its weight it must figure in the two sections following below, albeit in certain subsidiary aspects.

## II. The Church

*Ecclesia catholica nihil eorum, quae in his religionibus vera et sancta sunt, reiecit.*<sup>4</sup>

As everyone knows, the Church almost always uses the word "christianity" with circumspection in her documents. They refer to christians, to Christ, to the Church; but they do not treat of religions in a scholarly vein, nor do they say anything directly and categorically about christianity, which as a social embodiment of Christ's message in a particular culture remains one religion among the rest.

Clearly one religion cannot be another; and all religions cannot be of equal worth when they teach different things, often contradictory things. But the Church does not operate on that level. The obvious incompatibility between christianity and the other religions no longer holds good without more ado when we turn to the relation between the Church and other religious traditions.

Conciliar documents, and notably this Declaration, speak of the Church and the religions, which are inaccurately and inopportunately called non-christian religions (as not being christianity) in order to call them something and to differentiate between them and christianity. But that fact only corroborates the thesis which our commentary proposes to establish – that the Church

---

(4) The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions.



cannot identify herself with any one of the religions existing on earth. Her very claim to have a message for all mankind prevents her identifying herself at all with any one section of mankind—a thing which would be the most outrageous of injustices. That is our second point.

Speaking in terms of the history of religions—that is, in terms of religion as a branch of learning (*Religionswissenschaft*)—christianity is that religion scattered over the globe, in a highly special way over the western world, which took its rise with the Apostles twenty centuries ago after the death (and resurrection) of Jesus of Nazareth. Now to the mind of the Fathers, and of medieval and modern christians alike, the Church is not encompassed by that one religion alone, as Christ cannot be cut down to the historical doings of Jesus. Both theological investigations and conciliar texts on Christ and the Church uphold these statements of ours, which need no fuller explanation.

But a matter that theologians have scarcely heeded heretofore, although it forms part of the *kairos* of our time, is the relation between the Church and the world's religions. In other words: what goes by the name of christianity today is the turning to Christ of a set of religions which we may call Mediterranean. For manifest reasons *that* christianity can lay no claim to universal validity. By its very nature every religion has a body of doctrines, patterns of conduct, sacred ceremonies, and so forth, which necessarily find embodiment in and depend on given categories valid within a circumscribed cultural sphere. Attempting to universalize what is so concretely bound up with space and time, with the seasons and husbandry of the Mediterranean, with the ways of eating, thinking, and living, peculiar to that special area in a special age, would be at best perpetuating the most objectionable kind of colonialist outlook, a thing that today no one can dream of doing.

The Church's universality stands on quite another plane. She can be truly universal because she shares in the *kenosis* of Christ and because her nature overflows the historical order. As the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the leaven for the whole lump, the Church functions and sows seed destined to grow

in many a different soil; not only can she fit in with the most diverse milieux, she can embody and transmute the most diverse religions. The other religions too are called upon to turn to Christ, which does not mean that they must become part of what in our day goes by the name of christianity.

To put the matter in another way, whereas the connection between the Church and christianity is zealously and minutely studied, the connection between the Church and the other religions of mankind still lies there virgin territory, awaiting the explorer. This problem affects the growth of the Church both in breadth and in depth.

Much weight attaches to the fact that the only two quotations from Scripture to be found in the whole of number two are one from St John's Gospel (14: 6), on Christ as the way, the truth, and the life and the other from St Paul (2 Cor 5: 18-19), also on Christ in whom God reconciles the whole world to himself. In the same paragraph we likewise have a direct reference to the prologue of St John, where it speaks of the Truth that enlightens every man who comes into this world. The document says nothing at all about christianity as a religion, but speaks of Christ's universal role within the Church, within the world, and - we would make bold to add in a gloss in the deepest crannies of every religion.

This reading would make a goodly contribution, moreover, to the modern debate over whether christianity can exist without a religion. If words have any meaning, christianity is, by definition, a religion. On the other hand the Church is *not* a religion: she exists for the work of turning - "converting" in the strictest sense - every religion to Christ. Here we cannot so much as envisage the broad features of this new land, this virgin territory for theological investigation and for authentic christian living; but a whole body of missiology could be worked out at this point.

### III. Christians

*Filios suos... hortatur... ut... illa bona spiritualia... agnoscant, servant et promoveant.*<sup>5</sup>

Section three, the final one, addresses all the sons of the Church without differentiating among them in any way. Accordingly it stresses the duty of christians to bear themselves discreetly in their dealings with the adherents of other religions, and to be mindful of the love that must mark every such encounter. The text speaks of dialogue and cooperation with them.

Once again we have to point out a tremendous innovation, although the Declaration puts it forward with due restraint, in such a way as not to rush things or encourage recklessness. To use what hitherto has been in effect the professional parlance of canon lawyers, we might say that the text declares the true shape of communication with the other religions is *communicatio in sacris*: that is, cooperation not in secularized, desacralized areas but in the religious sphere – cooperation with them in their capacity as believers. At this time of day no conciliar pronouncement was needed in order to make it clear that men may travel in the same train with a person of some other religion, or may go into business with him. The cooperation which the text means is cooperation with believers of other religions as believers – a thing plain enough, after all, since nine religions out of ten would recognize no distinction, much less any divorce, between spiritual and social concerns, between morality and religion.

It is not as though the Council meant to gainsay or override the well-known canonical rule which forbids actively taking part in the worship of any other religion; rather it is thinking on a different plane. What one gathers from a careful reading of the text is the very opposite of the idea (underlying the canonical prohibition) that close cooperation amounts to disavowing

---

(5) The Church, therefore, has this exhortation for her sons: . . . (that they) acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual goods found among these men, . . .



the christian faith. The Declaration asserts that such cooperation places men on a footing where they can bear witness from within to christian faith and life. The relation indicated is not a surface one but one of genuine human intimacy. In his dealings with others the christian is no outsider but just the opposite, an impassioned follower of the Son of Man, whose delight it is to hold fellowship with men, his brothers.

The text intimates that witness to Christ can and should be borne precisely by whole-hearted, loyal cooperation with men belonging to other religious traditions; that is, not from outside but from the very bosom of the religions men live by. Salt does not yield up its savor from outside; leaven will not make the dough rise unless it is mixed into the dough; light does not shine until it strikes an opaque body; preaching from outside in alien terms will not set men living by the christian message, only living together with them and enduring together with them will do that, always provided one does not suspend one's christian faith. Setting aside all preconceived notions and ready-made sermons, one must let the Father speak with the voice of his sons, let men glorify him upon experiencing the good works of those who call themselves his followers and his authentic worshippers in spirit and in truth.

## Epilogue

*Quem dicunt homines esse Filium hominis ?*

— Mt 16: 13<sup>6</sup>

Peter's inspired answer to the Master's question was that he was the Messiah — that is, the Christ, the Anointed, the One prophesied about and longed for in Israel. In short Peter, a faithful israelite and disciple of Moses, gives the first historically basic reply: Thou art the Christ.

Well now, the commendation of him who called himself the Son of Man applies not only to the first part of Peter's answer but equally to its second part: "the Son of the living

---

(6) Who do men say that the Son of Man is ?

God"; and obviously the Son of God does not take up only the tradition that began with Abraham, but also embraces the two other great strands in universal redemptive history: Abel, the first man like ourselves (Adam and Eve were not born of woman like any son of man), the man who offered the first sacrifice pleasing to God, primitive man *par excellence*, the man good by creation, with no cultural or religious veneer; and Melchizedek, priest and king, the man uncircumcised who stood above Abraham, whom he blessed but did not join or follow, a priest of the world religions, the authority in every order of being, the representative of countless religious traditions that do not belong to the race of Abraham. The latter is indeed the father of all believers in terms of "historical" order but not in terms of mankind's roots the world over. This one is Melchizedek.

What we mean is that since Peter was answering in Israel he had perforce to say that Jesus was the Christ; but he said a more universal thing adding that Jesus was "the Son of the living God". No difficulty whatever arose over the subject of the sentence, because there before them all he stood: Jesus.

Christian theology has heretofore worked out one, so to say, of Jesus' ancestral lines, the Abrahamic. But Jesus was and worked before Abraham (not only before Moses). Jesus the Christ has ties not only with Abraham but also with Abel and with Melchizedek. From the one he received his manhood and from the other his priesthood. The Council's Declaration truly opens up boundless vistas for our eyes to behold. Jesus the Son of Man, the prophet, priest, and king, not only bespeaks bonds with the Abrahamic religions; albeit unknown there, he is present and secretly at work in all the religious forms that in one way or another trace back to Melchizedek, and in all the human forms that trace back to Abel, the primal, truly human man.

This epilogue opens a door for us not on the newest but on the oldest of theologies, the one whose fragrance has not died away in the West but breathes headier from those religions which are coming to be more justly valued in *nostra aetate*.

# The Revelational in Religion\*

## I

It is fairly widely taken for granted without challenge that the Western Traditions alone can lay claim to be characterized as revelational in origin and function. Putting aside any question as to whether or not any or all of them are in fact revelational, we must ask why other Traditions are presumed to be non-revelational. Westerners regard Buddhism, for example, as clearly non-revelational—and Buddhists typically seem to agree. If we review the basis for the judgment we find in such an instance that the presentation of the category *revelation* does indeed exclude Buddhism, and practically any other Eastern religion. This can mean either of two things: either whatever the revelational properly, is actually is limited to the Western experience, or the revelational has been conceived of much too narrowly in that the Western experience as culture-bound has innocently given rise to presuppositions of exclusion which are unrealistic in the light of the full range of religious phenomena. Obviously, any exploration of the question must be addressed to the latter alternative.

### The Traditional Christian Approach to Revelation in Other Religions.

At the outset it is interesting how much evidence of dissatisfaction with limiting revelation to the West we can discover within Christian theology. To be sure until recently it has been evidence of an indirect sort, but consistent in its implication. It can be put very simply: Christian theologians have often been made uneasy by discerning (however superficially) elements in the other Traditions which to the Christian look as if they should

---

\* A chapter (with certain omissions) from Robley Whitson's book: *The Coming Convergence of World Religions*, shortly to be published.



have a revelational basis (usually because they look like "Christian elements"). It does not matter that such elements are most often accounted for in an insensitive way and with makeshift theological devices—vestiges of a "primitive revelation" (pre-Noah, or the like), or supposed borrowings from Christianity, or a special revelational preparation for an approaching evangelization. For example, the early apologists "baptized" the Greek philosophers; Ricci found a certain accommodation with Confucianism. Apart from exhibiting varieties of reductionism, these are instances of experiential recognition of at least some aspects in other Traditions that appear to have a revelational basis (origin and/or function). This *can* indicate that the theological notion of revelation has been too narrow in construction and the theologians recognize this implicitly in the need to devise theological gadgets.

Naturally the cultural context in which the religious experience takes place and finds expression circumscribes the range of meaning any category can be given. This cultural relativity in words and meanings, though limiting, is the only condition whereby the experience-expression can be relevant to historical situations. As real people are this or that *sort* of people, so the reality of religious experience-expression naturally enough must be a corresponding *sort*. Of the several types of limitations imposed by this fact of cultural context, the one of interest to us here is the most subtle: the usual inability of the participant in the religious-cultural context to recognize consciously that there is such a limitation. The theological gadgets devised to account for that which has been pre-excluded from the identified historic revelational situation are the evidences for the unconscious recognition that the conscious definition of the revelational is inadequate.

There is another line of evidence of the problem created by cultural relativity even more impressive than that of the gadgets. Judaism, Christianity and Islam have most often centered their concern with the revelational upon sacred books. Each Tradition has scriptures, and anything approaching an "orthodox" attitude in each presupposes an essential link between the writing of the books and the occurrence of revelation. Putting

aside the particular questions of inspiration, inerrancy and the like, and also putting aside the judgments each Tradition makes about the revelational condition of the others' books. The identification of a revelational situation with the production and preservation of sacred writings should create at least theological embarrassment when it is noted that "non-revelational" Traditions also have books regarded as sacred and as essentially linked to the shared experience.

Apart from lifting out elements of "primitive revelation" or the like from these sacred texts, the theologians' solution to the dilemma has been simple: these are not to be regarded as sacred books or scriptures; for the progressive theologian they may indeed be "holy" and worthy of "reverence" for some reason and in some way, but they are not *Sacred Scriptures* in the proper sense. This judgment, of course, rests upon a presupposition: only certain received writings are *Scripture*. And this presupposition itself rests upon the implicit evaluation of absolutized exclusiveness for the Tradition of the theologian.

The theological argument is often filled out with another unchallenged culture bound type of judgment. A self-evident *quality* in the received Scripture is appealed to as a contrast to the "sacred writings of other people." Thus, the four Gospels are pointed to by Christians as unique in contents and expression, as is the Qur'ān by Muslims and the Torah by Judaists. And in each instance even a casual acquaintance with the writings supports such a view: each is unique, different substantially from the others, and from all others regardless of Tradition. The problem is that this assertion can and should be made for all of the bodies of sacred writings: each really is unique. This very fact attracts our attention to them, and it is clear that those who participate in the Tradition identifiable with this or that Scripture read those books as they can read no others.

When it is argued that the issue is not merely uniqueness as such, but the entire meaning and thrust of the writings whereby they have a unique significance for man, once again we must agree, but also point to the unresolved evaluation of *difference* and *relativity*. That *these books* seem uniquely signi-

ficant for man but not *those*, is a judgment that takes for granted that there is no convergent significance of no-longer-separate Traditions for one another. And the *exclusive* unique significance now still experienced in our separations means not that the other books do not speak significantly, but they *as yet* do not speak *to me*.

## II

### Revelation, Scripture and Experience

Much of the current Christian theological concern with the identification of the revelational with the Scriptures received within the Christian Church has been shaped by the relatively recent Reformation crisis with the particular emphasis placed (in any one of several ways) upon the words of the texts. Whether one adhered to a Protestant conviction of the Scripture in itself as the sole norm of Faith or to a Catholic conviction of Scripture and Apostolic Tradition as interpreted by the authority of the Church, one could not separate the revelational and Scripture. And as explicitly one could not admit to the corpus of Scripture any but the already received documents, implicitly one could not admit anything further to the "content" of revelation, nor extend the scope of the revelational to include ranges of religious experience not directly assimilable to the "Judaeo-Christian".

Yet the examination of pre-Reformation theological history provides us with conceptualizations of revelation which do not admit of this type of narrowness. This is not to say that there is an explicit extension of the revelational beyond the accommodations discussed previously. But there are structures which at least implicitly open up the range of meaning beyond the confines of a closed religious system.

### St Bonaventure's Approach

The theological tradition formed in the experiential emphasis of the early Greek Fathers, carried forward into the Western Church by Augustine, and during the high Middle

Ages systematized in the Franciscan branch of scholasticism proposes a potentially open-ended significance for revelation. For Bonaventure all of phenomenal existence is to be seen as coming forth from God and as in the process of returning to Him. Thus, in the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*<sup>1</sup> man is depicted as on a journey, as a pilgrim, through a world by no means alien to him or to God, his goal. The world in everything that composes it reflects God in countless ways and so aids man in his quest for return.

For Bonaventure there are two symbols of primary importance, *mirror* and *book*, which portray the reflectivity of creation. First, all of reality shows forth God as in a mirror which draws man on in an ever intensifying light as man step by step approaches union with God. Thus, the cosmos is a mirror, or *speculum*, for God makes it possible for man to *speculate* or see – to contemplate the reality of God as this is reflected in literally everything. And so the universe as a mirror is the basis for man's *knowing* something intellectually of God and for his *beholding* God in religious experience.

In the light of the traditional Christian linking of the revelational with the Scriptures, Bonaventure's other symbol of the *book* implies an even more open meaning for revelation than does the mirror. At the outset we should note that the book symbol is not focused on the sense of a book as an object and hence static, but on the process of *reading a book*. As with the mirror symbol, we are concerned with man as actively *in via* and so *moving*. To read the book rightly enlightens man so that he can progress toward his goal of union with God.

In terms of the ultimate relation of cosmos to God the book is actually two-fold :

There are two books: one written within, which is the eternal art and wisdom of God; and the other written without, that is the material world.<sup>2</sup>

(1) Bonaventure: *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. (*S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, Vol. V. Quaracchi, 1882 – 1902).

(2) Bonaventure: *Breviloquium*, II, c. 11. n. 2. (*Opera Omnia*, V.)



In terms of the unfolding of history as God reveals Himself to man, the book is found to be three-fold :

.... the foundation of the whole Christian Faith.... has a triple testimony.... considered from the standpoint of three books : the book of creation, the book of scripture and the book of life.... The book of creation.... first shown to our senses gives a two-fold testimony.... For every creature is either a vestige, only, of God such as are corporeal natures, or also an image of God as are intellectual creatures.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that this three-fold book symbol is being employed by Bonaventure to situate the process of the revelation of God as Trinity which he identifies doctrinally as "the foundation of the whole Christian Faith"! So we have a pointed indication of how much weight he intends to place upon expressions which locate the revelational process in a much wider range than that supposedly bounded by the texts of sacred books. And even more explicit is his enumeration of the three books, with the book of the scripture having its relevance between the book of creation (as the book written without) and the book of life (as the book written within) .

Now this double testimony of the book of nature (that is, the testimony of creation as *vestiges* and as *images*) was efficacious in the state in which nature was created, when this book was not obscure and the eye of man had not been clouded. But when man's eye was clouded by sin, that mirror was made obscure and dark,<sup>4</sup> and the ear of his interior intelligence became deaf to hearing that testimony.<sup>5</sup> And therefore Divine Providence

---

(3) Bonaventure: *Quaestiones Disputatae de Mysterio Trinitatis*, q. 1, a. 2, oncl. (*Opera Omnia*, V.)

(4) Cf. I Cor. 13 : 12 - "We see now in a mirror in an obscure manner".

(5) The joining of the eye's blindness and the deafness of the interior ear does not constitute a confusion of the *book* symbol; the *book* is not only to be read with the eye, but also to be read out and hence heard, in the context of the monastic *lectio divina*.

planned and provided for the testimony of another book, namely the book of Scripture, which was published by divine revelation....<sup>6</sup>

But the third book, the book of life, *goes beyond* the book of scripture and the book of creation :

But since "not all obey the Gospel," and this truth (that is, the doctrine of the Trinity) is above reason, therefore Divine Wisdom provided an eternal testimony, which indeed is the book of life. Now this book of life through itself and in itself explicitly and expressly gives irresistible testimony.... to those who with face unveiled see God in the *homeland* (that is, at the completion of man's journey of return to God), but on the way it gives testimony according to the influence of the light which the soul is capable of in the wayfarer's state.... It enlightens in two ways, namely, through an innate light, and through an infused light....

.... For through a light placed naturally within man by God and stamped as the light of the divine, each one's own reason dictates to himself that concerning the first principle we ought to think most highly and most piously.... And on this point Christians, Jews, Saracens and also heretics agree....

If, then, we ask – what moves one to believe this—whether, namely, Scripture or miracles or grace or eternal truth itself?—it should be said that what principally moves to this is that very illumination which begins in the innate light and reaches its culmination in the infused light.... And this is clear from experience, if anyone would have recourse to the hidden depths of his own mind.<sup>7</sup>

It is quite evident that Bonaventure's understanding of the revelational encompasses every aspect of all that exists. It is equally evident that, far from limiting revelation to the idea content of sacred writings or even accepting the significance of scriptures as the centre or norm of revelation, the norm and

---

(6) Bonaventure: *Quaestiones Disputatae*, as above.

(7) *Ibid.*

highest manifestation of the revelational are to be found in the experience of illumination. And this is not to be located in written books, but in the book of life. From this we should be able to conclude that for those who do not know the Gospel and hence cannot obey it there is no loss, since in the life process of experience as they travel *in via* they will receive illumination according to their progressive need and capacity, and ultimately find the completion of revelation in the "face to face" encounter with God in union.

It is not an exaggeration to recognize that Bonaventure has reduced the function of the Scriptures to a pragmatic remedy for a portion of the damage of sin with its impairment of man's vision. And this is only *a* remedy, not at all *the* remedy insofar as he expressly presumes that the non-Christian is fully *in via* and hence actively reading and responding to the book of life. His appeal to "Christians, Jews, Saracens and heretics" is interesting in that he is encompassing all the kinds of peoples with their differing religious Traditions, at least as known in his day. This universalism in revelation is not at all confined to scriptures, and the norm of judgment thus rests within the experience of illumination open to *anyone* who "would have recourse to the hidden depths of his own mind."

In the light of this range of meaning for the revelational we must conclude that at least for some theological schools the revelational is a universally applicable category not limited to a single conceptual content but rather open to the entire range of religious experience. Further, revelational religious experience is not confined to the "extraordinary" or "higher" or "mystic", but is properly — not by accommodation — anything which in any way manifests what the word "God" is intended to identify.

Within this framework there is no distinction or division possible between "revelational" and "non-revelational" traditions. There are simply historically different kinds of revelational traditions — the differences in kind to be accounted for not on the basis of *content* (true / false; fullness-of-time / primitive; complete / partial; and soon), but on the recognition of the variety of authentic historic *situations* in which men experience and share in.

## III

**Revelational in Buddhist Religious Experience**

The non-Western Traditions have been classed as non-revelational and have usually accepted that classification. This must be seriously challenged, not merely because we find theological systematizations from the past which define the revelational broadly enough to include them, but because any thrust toward convergence demands that we discern and develop all unitive dimensions. The narrowness of the conceptualization of revelation generally accepted since the Reformation has resulted in an imperialistic sense of exclusiveness on the part of Christian theology, which has even prevented Christians from taking Judaism and Islam seriously. Political imperialism imposed this narrowness on all non-Western Traditions so effectively that it is still rarely questioned. Without doubt, universalizing the revelational and locating its normativeness in the consciousness of the inner depths of experience of the Sacred, and this as shared, will be very disturbing for all Traditions, East and West; for it will demand the emergence of a true reverence for the authenticity of each Tradition. This reverence will not be satisfied by the politeness of superficial dialogue nor by simplistic indifferentism. Even a passing consideration of this "new" theological dimension seen functioning in the here to fore "non-revelational" Traditions can indicate the scope of the impact to be felt.

In any reconstruction of the main lines of the religious experience of the historic Buddha we can see this broader sense of revelation verified.<sup>8</sup> Taking up the account at the moment of the crisis which calls him to seek enlightenment, we find Gautama confronted with the archetypal challenge of destruction experi-

---

(8) We are here following the biographical tradition according to the *Budhacharita* of Ashvaghosha, as condensed by Edward Conze in *Buddhist Scriptures*; these materials as portraying the elements in Gautama's religious experience can be considered apart from any particular interpretation brought to them by the various schools of Buddhism.



enced in the immediacy of existence. In three symbolic encounters he is brought face to face with old age, sickness and death. Understanding what old age means to life, that it slowly but inexorably destroys mind, beauty and strength, he is appalled that the world goes on day by day unperturbed at the doom awaiting every man. He can no longer imagine enjoying life if he must fear his own aging. He next realized what sickness is, capable of afflicting anyone at any moment, making a sense of personal security impossible, a constant threat worse than old age, and yet once again the world takes no notice of what this must mean for life. Finally, he is grasped by the reality of death, the end fixed for all, the sentence of total loss for all that lives, and he despairs that none seems aware of what this should mean for the value of life. He can now find no happiness in anything, knowing that all even now is in the process of destruction.

This is a moment of complete disillusionment — not merely in the discovery of the destruction embedded in existence, but even more in the awareness that men are capable of blinding themselves and living in the illusion of security. Westerners often evaluate Buddhism as a commitment to total pessimism, but this is only true in one dimension, in the statement of the *problem* demanding enlightenment. Buddha's encounter with the negation of existence is not the conclusion of an analytical intellectual procedure but the existential confrontation with the crisis of meaning: at the core of the experience of living there is no security, no substance, no permanence — all is every moment passing away. It is the terrifying discovery of *meaninglessness*. But something immediately happens to him in this moment of disillusion. He recognizes that he is one with other men. Knowing that there is no ultimacy at the core of his own existence as such, he ceases to have pride in his own vitality and strength — we are told that suddenly all hatred and contempt for others were removed from his mind. This is the beginning of the positive transformation *from illusion*, taking place in the very act of disillusionment, the origin of the reversal of what would seem to be the dead-end of meaninglessness.

It is characteristic of much of contemporary Western existentialism to conclude the exploration of the significance of

reality with the affirmation of meaninglessness. Man is thus doomed to tragedy. The ultimate evaluation of all existence is negative and pessimistic. The most that can be expected from the noblest that is in man is something akin to Buddha's concern for others insofar as he recognizes a human fraternity among the doomed. A certain congeniality for Buddhism has grown within some Westerners — or, better, a congeniality for their reading of Buddhism. For they stop woefully short, resting with Buddha's recognition of meaninglessness and his first personal reaction to it, and fail completely to see the immediate reversal of negative to positive. Buddha does not conclude his religious quest with the recognition of meaninglessness: this is the beginning point. The confrontation with meaninglessness precipitates his quest: is there a way to destroy meaninglessness, is there a way to achieve liberation? His new vision of himself in relation to others, that no one is superior since all are doomed to old age, sickness and death — to meaninglessness — is not his new life commitment, but the opening phase of the progressive revolution his life must undergo if he is to attain to liberation.

In the narrative of Buddha's life, Gautama is now confronted with a holy man, one who has perceived man's tragedy and has embarked on the quest for resolution. He tells the future Buddha that he has left all — home, kinsmen, possessions, the taste for life — since none has any significance, and now searches for the end to extinction. And Gautama realizes he too must take up the life of homelessness and become a searcher. At this point we should be aware of the actual interrelation of the negative and positive (end, pessimism and optimism) in Buddhism. The evaluation of existence *as we know it* as negative implies an opposite. If life is substanceless there must be something which is not. Buddhism is pessimistic about the human condition as it is, but is supremely optimistic about what man's destiny *can be*. And hence the calling coming to man in his encounter with meaninglessness: turn away from this illusion — implying that there is "something else": the extinction of extinction.

In legend Gautama embarks upon his quest by taking up the traditional asceticism of the wandering holy man, practising austerities almost to the point of death in the attempt to achieve

enlightenment. In the end he discovers he is as far from his goal as when he began and so concludes that this is not the way to freedom. And so he abandons the ascetical way and resolutely gives himself over to meditation, to penetrate the ultimate meaning of transitoriness and emerge into the illumination of its opposite. We are told he began his meditation intent on the discovery of the ultimate reality of things and the goal of existence. (And we should note again the positive orientation of the quest as a turning away from the false.)

The meditation is recorded as a series of steps. In the first phase, he attains to the conviction (not merely as an abstract intellectual conclusion, but as an encounter) that this world of change as it passes away from moment to moment is totally without any inner substantialness. In the second phase he becomes convinced that there is also nothing substantial in the world of becoming. In the third phase he passes from the awareness of the negatives to the positive foundation of liberation; he sees that it is blindness that keeps man from realizing the falseness of illusion of thinking the world of becoming as substantial, and so illumination destroys ignorance and with the cessation of ignorance there cease old age, sickness and death and all that is false. Perceiving *what is not* is the *liberation from* illusion which in itself allows the *liberation into* enlightenment to take place. Gautama becomes the Buddha, the enlightened, as at this point of encounter he passes through the experience of liberation from the *false* into the *true*. And so this final phase is spoken of in terms of permanence: having reached the state of all-knowledge, he is in the state of changelessness, *Nirvāṇa*, all that is opposed to transitoriness.

Once again it is appropriate to recall the expression of this as an act of travel to *the Other Shore*.<sup>9</sup> The actual movement *from* and *to* integrally involves the change in the state of consciousness and of existence. Achieving the Other Shore is experiential, yet can be conceptualized only reflectively in terms of negating what *this* shore of transitoriness and meaninglessness

---

(9) Cfr. above p.

seems to be. The *entire process* is the Wisdom of the Other Shore, the symbol of enlightenment.

It should be self-evident that, in spite of the great differences in orientation between the Christian and the Buddhist experience, what *happened* to Buddha is properly revelational in character. If we think back to Bonaventure's symbolism we can recognize the *reading* of the two-fold book of life (and antecedently the book of creation as well) in the *experience of liberation* of the historic Buddha and of Buddhists following this way to enlightenment.

If we are inclined to accept Buddhism within the category of revelation we must do so seriously, not in an accommodational manner. The discussion evolved in this chapter does not have for its purpose the adjustment of the revelational to make it a "little broader" or more sensitive to anything like "primitive revelation." The consideration of Buddhism, brief though it is, is designed as a demonstration of the unrealistic narrowness of the Western *conceptualization* of revelation, and hence the demand placed upon theologians to redefine the category to encompass properly the wide range of meaning belonging to the revelational. Of course in this process we must expect major adjustments or revisions within the Western Traditions since revelation could no longer be thought of in an exclusivistic basis, and, even more important, since the *historic* character of the actual revelational process as pluralistic in scope cannot be defined in terms of single chronological sequences or isolated historic moments. Thus, not only must the three sequences of Judaic, Christian and Islamic revelational chronology be related to each other (which they are not at present— "Old Testament," "New Testament" and "Qur'an" representing self-contained closed histories of revelation), but the recognition of revelation—in historic-process calls for the acceptance of parallel and overlapping chronological history whose full evaluation depends on the kind of meaning achieved in the coming convergence. Put simply, to close a canon of sacred scriptures at a certain point with a certain content only defines one dimension of the revelational process, a dimension certainly authentic in itself but having a further authenticity in convergence with others.



## IV

## Revelational Sense in Confucianism

Are there non-revelational forms of religion? The answer depends on the definition given to the category. The Bonaventurian theology of revelation would clearly insist that all Traditions are revelational (especially recalling Bonaventure's appeal to the agreement of "Christians, Jews, Saracens and also heretics" on the first principle, cited previously). Yet there are Traditions which specifically deny any revelational character to their origin or content; cannot (must not?) these be non-revelational? Again the answer must depend upon the definition of the category. Close examination will readily demonstrate that Traditions denying a revelational character to themselves are rejecting a narrow definition—they have merely acquiesced in the assumptions made by other Traditions as to what constitutes the revelational.

Once again Confucianism can provide us with a very demanding testing of our proposal. In all contacts with Western religion, Confucianists have always maintained that the *Way of Ritual* is not derived from any source but human insight, both in terms of the ways of tradition as shaped in history and in terms of the wisdom of the sages interpreting tradition as mediated by continuing scholarship. As mentioned before, Westerners like Ricci were delighted to find "remnants" of "primitive revelation" in the Confucian Tradition, but certainly agreed with their New-Confucian colleagues that Confucianism was a philosophy and standard of ethics and *therefore* not revelational (probably not to be classed as religion either). This seems to be confirmed by Confucius himself when he declares that he is not one who has innate knowledge but is simply one who both loves the past and studies it.<sup>10</sup> We should recall again the disciple's explication of the nature of the Master's teaching:

---

(10) *Analects* VII, 19.

- Tzu-kung said: We are permitted to hear the Master's views on culture and the manifestations of the Good (jen). But he will not speak to us at all on the nature of man and the Way of Heaven.<sup>11</sup>

Confucius's vision of the relation of things expressed through *ritual* was such that he surely goes beyond the "merely traditionalist" or "merely ethical" to point all things to the Transcendent while never speaking directly of it. Hence, *to know the meaning* of the Great Sacrifice would be to know all that is under Heaven.<sup>12</sup>

While he denies innate knowledge in himself, Confucius claims that it is Heaven that begot the power (*Te*) which is in him.<sup>13</sup> There is power, *Te*, in everything and everyone, all derived from the Principle hypostasized in traditional language as Heaven, so Confucius is not claiming that he uniquely has received Heaven's power. But he is claiming that Heaven's power in him is unique because it is the power-in-him. It is in himself as empowered that he loves and studies the past, that is, the previous manifestations through ritual (*Li*) of the relation of earth-man-society-cosmos with Heaven. Recollecting the central concerns of primitive Confucianism discussed earlier, we can represent the core of Confucius' Way of Ritual, *Tao Li*, in this systematic structure:

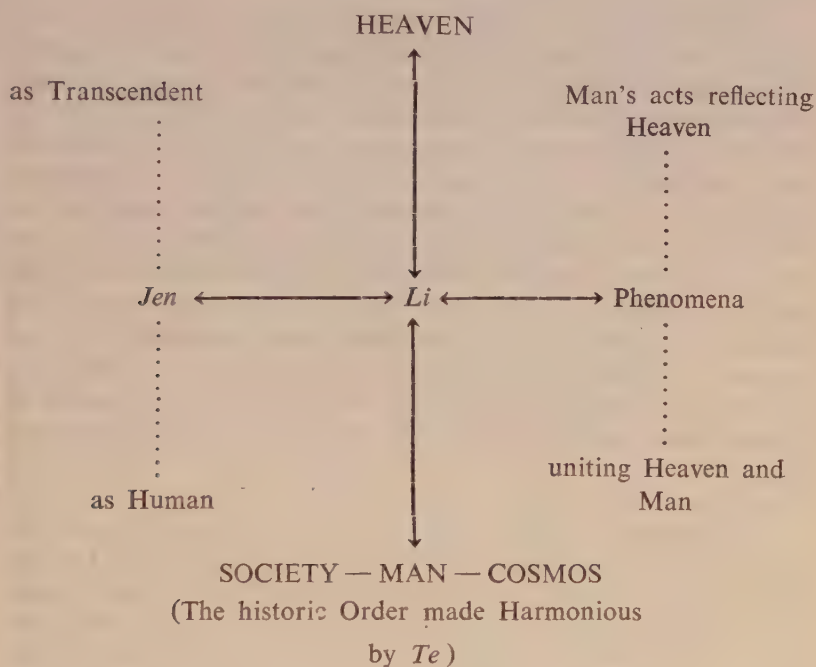
---

(11) *Analects*, V, 12; as in *Mysticism and Ecumenism*, p. 168:

(12) *Analects*, III, 11; as in *Mysticism and Ecumenism* p. 168.

(13) *Analects*, VII, 22.

(Principle of Reality)



It does not seem possible to escape the conclusion that Confucianism at its core is properly a religious Tradition and properly revelational in character. In the Bonaventurian concept of the revelational, *Li* is clearly the center of the book of creation and the book of life, made existentially real for man by the implanting in him of the power of Heaven whereby the Principle of Reality is integrally present in what man does.

Confucianism as a Tradition has always dealt with *Li*. Confucius taught about culture (the things of life) and the manifestations of *jen* (the doings of life) as these show forth what the Principle of life is. The *Tao Li*, therefore, is markedly secular in character yet with a reverence for the secular which bears silent but eloquent witness to what the secular actually is in the vision of Confucius: the revelation of Ultimacy.

## Conclusion

Obviously, the question of the meaning of the revelational goes far beyond a theological redefinition of systematic categories. It is evident that the considerations developed above challenge the distinction between revelational and non-revelational as irrelevant in any sort of context, not simply culture-bound to one Tradition or to one theological interpretation of a Tradition. In the light of being able to extend the range of meaning of the revelational, the development of an empirical form of theology is very important. As the range of the revelational includes such a wide variety of truly diverse dimensions (both among the several distinct Traditions and internally with reference to scriptures, the "secular," "inspiration," and the like), theology as a systematizing discipline must have the capacity to address many types of issues and modes of approach in religious experience.

The most important challenge of all, however, is to the religious experience of those of the Western Traditions. Concentration upon religion as revelation has been within well determined limits, basically within the texts of sacred scriptures. This concentration has been dynamic and creative, and it has been the source of a sense of stability and security. The challenge is thus direct and bold: can they embrace a "revelation explosion" in the convergence of religions? The Christian intellectual tradition in theology can and does speak of a universal character of the entire revelational process (and we find comparable instances in Judaic and Islamic theology). But what is the reaction *in religious experience* when this ceases to be a theological generality and is present existentially as we confront the sharing of experience? We must remember that for Bonaventure and others up to this point, the "Jews, Saracens and heretics" were usually existentially remote from individual and communal involvement: the book of creation and the book of life could be thought of on so grand a scale of cosmos and history that actually one could remain psychologically within the covers of the book of scriptures -- the Scriptures as Revelation received and closed within one text only.



Scriptures as writings witnessing to Revelation evoke a unique response from the one capable of reading them experientially: This is a Book like no other book. In a convergence of religious experience, the challenge is to a new unique response: These are Books like no other books. It is the rare Christian who can "feel" the Qur'ân when it is in his hand (and not merely in "reverence for reverence", but authentically), will he be able to "feel" the *Great Learning*?

It never has been the case  
that what was of great importance  
has been slightly cared for,  
and also that what was of slight importance  
has been greatly cared for.

Robley Whitson

# Traditional Religion In The Modern World

The modern scientific world arose out of a past powerfully moulded by Christianity, one of the great traditional religions of mankind. Yet from the beginning there has been a certain tension between our religious traditions and our modern scientific secular society. At times a fierce antagonism has coexisted with a certain amount of understanding, approval and mutual support. In general, however, it can be said that relations between the two have never been adequately managed. This seems to be one of the special tasks to which our present world is called. What we look for is not a total understanding between religious traditions and scientific developments but a working relationship and mutual appreciation. Each must remain in some manner a mystery to the other as love and reason are mysteries to each other although each modifies and supports the other. The proper integration of the manifold dimensions of human life requires neither total comprehension nor mutual exclusion; it consists rather in an interplay of tensions that are both functional and creative.

These problems of modern and traditional values, as they exist in the present, are primarily western problems, although they have become world problems. All traditional civilizations experience a certain threat in the face of the modern, aggressive, all-demanding secularist world. While there are many aspects of these problems that deserve attention I present the following for consideration.

First, the modern, scientific, technological world is not primarily responsible for the decline in the religious life of mankind. The religious life of man in its traditional forms, even the creative power in the cultural life of traditional civilizations, had reached a certain state of exhaustion prior to the definitive rise of our scientific secularist world. If we examine the humane

situation in the late 18th and early 19th century we will find that the major spiritual traditions of the world were in a state of general decline. This is true both of Asia and of the West. Christianity had reached its lowest ebb at the end of the 18th century in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions, probably also Judaism in the Jewish traditions except for the Hasidist movement in Poland. This decline can be seen with special clarity in India and China.

India at the end of the 18th century was in a desperate cultural situation. The ancient traditions of learning had declined, partly as a result of foreign political domination of large sections of the country, partly due to the inherent weaknesses of India's social structure. Other causes too were at work, the most significant probably being a certain passivity in the face of life's difficulties derived from the doctrine of *karma*.

China was in a state of unprogressive equilibrium. Life continued in its fixed patterns. Much was achieved politically and in the realm of scholarship, yet the deeper creative forces of the spiritual, cultural and intellectual orders were no longer expressing themselves with the vigour of earlier periods.

If we look at the world of Islam, we find a similar period of static fixation. There had been great political and cultural achievements in the 16th century during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) and that of Akbar in India (1556-1605) but in the spiritual order the Islamic world of the late 18th century was clearly in a most uncreative period.

Surveying the spiritual situation of man in the higher civilizations then, at the beginning of the 19th century we find a setting in which a scientific-secular development could take a place with little capacity on the part of these civilizations to provide the new spiritual interpretation and the spiritual dynamic that was needed. Instead the spiritual traditions began to cast the blame for their own deteriorated situation on the rising forces that took over the task of directing these societies and providing for man a new set of secular values. Then the battle began in earnest. The surviving religious elements of western

life were blamed by secularism for the difficulties it was experiencing. In both instances antagonism was founded on an effort by each to make other a scapegoat for the deficiencies each found in itself.

My second proposition is that the scientific endeavour is profoundly indebted to the religious traditions of the West. These established the necessary conditions in which science could develop to its present state of eminence. That science depended greatly on the spiritual traditions of the west and not entirely on the Hellenic thought tradition is indicated by the inability of Islamic world to carry on its scientific enterprise although it was also heir to the Hellenic scientific tradition. In the 11th and 12th centuries Islam was far superior to the Christian West in its total intellectual development. Islam was even the teacher of the West. Yet despite this high achievement the Islamic spiritual traditions did not permit development of a modern order of human life. The entire cultural life of Islam lost its creative power under a dominant religious force that could not reconcile reason and faith, the philosopher and the believer, and the natural world and divine direction of the universe. The great achievement of 13th-century Christendom was to establish a fruitful inter-communion of these pairs. This required placing unusual stress on the lower of these elements, on reason as much as on faith, on the reality of the phenomenal world as on the existence of a transcendent world. Thomas of Aquin established a remarkable harmony between these, but his emphasis on the reality of the phenomenal, rational, secular order, his insistence on the inherent efficacy of the "second cause", set up many of the conditions that permitted the modern world to be born. Before him there were Albert the Great and number of others; after him came a succession of great men who carried the Western tradition down to the brilliant scientific achievements that distinguish modern man.

But the religious tradition of Western Christendom, after establishing the context in which scientific development took place, became themselves alienated from the modern world by their failure to understand either themselves or the world which they had brought into existence. Their anxiety to be faithful to their



own heavenly origins weakened their ability to pursue their proper earthly course. Their own history was moving too far and too fast. The difficulty was essentially the difficulty of success which often is less easily managed than failure. Here we should note certain fundamental religious orientations that conditioned the western mind for the development of science.

There is, first, the commitment to the world both as real and as of supreme value. In its religious origins the West is by far the most materialistic of the higher civilizations that we know of in the Eurasian world. Then there is the commitment of Christianity to the powers of human reason, and acceptance of the principle that reason and faith are mutually beneficial rather than destructive to each other. Christianity has paid such high tribute to human intelligence that it has often suffered from the accusation of confining its own higher spiritual vision within the narrow range of man's native powers of comprehension.

I would like now to pass on to the consideration of a third proposition concerning the relation of traditional Western religion to the modern world. Both are committed to history as developmental process rather than as cyclic repetition according to the norms of the cosmological time sequence of the solar day, month, year. Here it is necessary to go beyond the question of values, spiritual or material, beyond the question of the traditional and the modern, back to the most basic of all questions: the question of the human condition. The ultimate concerns of both science and religion are with the human condition in the full range of its implications. Intellectually and spiritually everything in human life depends on the manner in which we experience the human condition, on how we respond to this condition, and whether we manage it in a creative or a destructive direction.

Whatever joy man may have in life, there is a deep sense of tragedy inbuilt in man's experience of himself and the world in which he exists. In his raw uncultivated state man is not a satisfactory being. The human condition is experienced as thoroughly and absolutely unsatisfactory. It must be radically altered to a degree so great that what results is traditionally

described as a new birth, a truly human and spiritual birth. Otherwise the first birth remains unproductive: it never comes to terms with itself but is left in an undeveloped, indeed a savage condition. How to sustain the pain of existence, meanwhile, how to give it meaning, then how to impose upon it a transforming saving discipline,—these are the basic problems. Traditional religions consider that all the forces in heaven and earth must contribute to this transforming process, to this new birth. This is the meaning of initiation rituals found among primitive peoples. It is the meaning of Christian baptism, of the Hindu bestowal of the sacred cord. This sense of giving man a new birth is the essential doctrine of Marxist socialism.

In the traditional period there was general agreement that his new birth brought man into a higher, sacred, and spiritual order which radiates over the whole of life and gives sublime meaning to every least detail of human existence. The whole purpose of life is to bring this higher birth to its full expression. This is not only the process of salvation from the human condition. It is the transformation of the human condition itself.

But if this salvation doctrine of a higher spiritual birth is common to many traditions of Asia and the West, the West had from the beginning a unique awareness that salvation has a historical dimension. Man attains this new birth only as a member of the community in the course of its historical development. Mankind in its universal extent forms a single community which is attaining a spiritual transformation within a historical developmental context. Here we find the most profound agreement between the traditional and modern worlds and also the greatest opposition. Modern man is committed to historical communal salvation. Personal salvation does not move him. It is hardly conceivable to him. He is committed to social and historical salvation even above individual salvation. There is indeed an extreme selfishness in modern man, a constant betrayal in favour of individual aggrandizement, but insofar as a person finds any commitment this is to the community and to the higher human process.

If we trace this sense of historical development back to its sources we find that it was enunciated by the early prophets

as the coming Day of the Lord toward which all temporal events were moving. This vision achieved clear expression in Isaiah and in Daniel. Later it formed the conclusion of the Christian scriptures in the *Apocalypse* of John the Evangelist. This Day of the Lord is described as a period of peace and abundance. The very constitution of the world is to be altered. The lion and the lamb will lie down together. The nations will all come to the Mountain of the Lord. Swords will be beaten into ploughshares; heaven and earth will be reconciled in a transformed world wherein man's original paradisaal existence will be re-established. All this is to be achieved in and through a transforming historical process.

I would propose that nothing in Western life or in the life of the modern world can be understood in any depth apart from this historical vision that originated in prophetic proclamation. It rings terribly clear in the Bolshevist revolutionary movement that experiences itself as embodying the historical dynamic of the ages, as having as its mission the shattering of a past world to liberate man from the human condition and give him a new birth into a higher order of existence. This emphasis on a new birth process is clearly stated in the poets of Russia after the revolution of 1917. It stamps all forms of utopian revolutionary socialism of our times, whether in legitimate or distorted form, as expressing something deeply felt in the total religious life of man.

This same drive toward a new world is found in liberal democratic societies of the West. The sense of what this new birth is to be and how it is to be attained is vastly different in both, and this is what is so terrifying in our present social conflicts. America was founded on the belief that it was bringing this new birth to mankind. That America, born out of a decadent European world, was the last great hope of mankind. Both democratic society and Marxist societies are agreed that the Day of the Lord, the higher birth of mankind, is an infra-historical process that has little to do with spiritual rebirth into a higher trans-temporal order of things, such as was experienced in the earlier religious traditions of the West.

This brings us to the main point of this paper, the question of the earthly infra-historical and the divine trans-historical orders. Are these to be considered as separate, as alien and antagonistic to each other, or should they be considered as two aspects of a single salvation process, as the total response of man to his human condition. It should be said that from the beginning there was a certain ambiguity in the scriptural pronouncements. It was not clear there how much of the human transformation was to be an interior spiritual process and how much was to be a transformation of the earthly conditions of human life. This has become the central ambiguity of our modern world. Salvation from the human condition? Is it merely an adjustment of man to the world of time and matter, or is it also a higher spiritual process leading man to an experience beyond all the dimensions of time and space, a divine experience liberating man from the very confinements of temporal and spatial existence? Does man live simultaneously within a heavenly and an earthly kingdom? How are these one? How are they distinct?

The ideal of a trans-temporal mystical experience of the divine remained the basic spiritual ideal of the Christian world until the late medieval period. But then ideas of earthly progress began to take shape as an infra-historical, human, social, scientific development over which man had a basic control. This sense of historical progress seized upon our world in a powerful way especially through the Hegelian sense of ontological development, the Marxist sense of social development, the Darwinian sense of physiological development and the Nietzschean awareness that contemporary man is a bridge, an over-going to a superior human type, superman. With these ideas the great religious task, the great religious experience of man is no longer the ancient spiritual experience of divine presence, of divine communion, of participation in divine life. It is the experience of an emerging earthly world, of an emerging mankind, of a new intellectual vision, of a new and more satisfying social order.

This is to be achieved by social transformation of man and by man's scientific and technological mastery of the surrounding



world. Science and social ideals have both become substitute mysticisms. Technology is the sacrament of man's new birth. With their inner mystical dimensions and outer efficacy, science and technology provide an analysis of the human condition and a transforming remedy. The infra-historical drive of science is something that must be thoroughly understood for it is this that constitutes the inner core of the question concerning the relationship between traditional spiritual values and the values of the modern world. Science is the main instrument for attaining the higher human development. Science, the world, human intelligence — these now become self-sufficient components of a new religious attitude. Just how should we regard this? Some would maintain that this new secular city is the fulfilment of the earlier traditions predicting the coming of a heavenly city. Is this the new, the true Christianity? To what extent is the eclipse of God and the neglect of ritual worship both a genuine humanism and a genuine form of religion? To what extent is this the authentic carrying out of the moral imperative of Genesis to subdue the earth, to develop the world and make it fructify?

Is this to do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven? Is this in some profound way to hallow the name of God? Is this to bring the heavenly kingdom to earth? Is this the way to get our daily bread, the way to establish the human community, the way to be delivered from evil in its absolute form? If we answer affirmatively then we can say that this age, in its structure and overall direction, is religious even in a Christian sense. Our problem, then, is to convert religion to the world rather than to convert the world to religion. Many are thinking in this direction, and with much good reason. For whether we agree or disagree with this judgment we must see the problem of the modern and traditional worlds in this context. Then we must ask: To what extent were the traditional religious values bound up exclusively with a trans-temporal, trans-earthly religious experience? Was not the religious rebirth of man always associated with a temporal historical birth process?

My own answer would be that an integral understanding of Western religion, both Judaic and Christian, reveals that it

has always had a commitment to the order of time, to the human, earthly destiny of man, to social justice. The modern world, while extreme in its attitude, does not constitute any essential attack on the religious traditions of the West except where it misunderstands both itself and the religious tradition out of which it was born.

I do not say that it is now possible to convince moderns of the religious aspect of their work or that it is possible to convince religious persons that this work in the order of time, society and history is a fulfilment rather than a denial of traditional values. But whether or not either side is convinced of the validity of the other's position, the fact remains that this is our problem, and it demands our attention.

Here it should be observed that the world committed simply to the secular, scientific order does not find abiding satisfaction in what it is achieving. Ignorant of any spiritual significance in what they are doing men remain profoundly dissatisfied, inwardly starved, spiritually and humanly debilitated, unable to carry out their finest endeavours successfully. The world is not experiencing the higher re-birth that is needed. The changes effected by scientific and technological improvements of our earthly status are not sufficient. It can well be the work of the spiritual tradition of the West to reveal to the modern world its own nobility, to cure its self-distrust and reflexive cynicism at its failures. This is at least one essential aspect of the re-birth, — this commitment to the higher human process. Christianity, however, concerned with the experience of the divine, considers this earthly task an integral part of the total creative — redemptive process.

But when we look closer we see that this cynicism of modern man towards his own work is extremely difficult to deal with because there is a basic cruelty in this higher human process. Its achievements are shared by an élite lifted higher and higher in the course of time while the submerged masses of mankind enter into a new agony made the more bitter by new sensitivity to human suffering and by awareness that the new knowledge and powers of man are capable of relieving much of

this agony. Some of this agony, indeed, as we see it, for instance, in the great slums of our cities, are the direct result of the new progress itself. What is presently so frustrating is that the efforts at producing remedies are consistently failing in a manner that is leading to a mood of desperation, of unmitigated cynicism, to violent outbursts and destructive revolutionary movements. Some of these threaten the foundations of all existing social and political order. We are already experiencing a rising anarchy in social relations that gives every thinking man certain forebodings about the future, even our immediate future.

Beyond this is the deeper tragedy of inner spiritual destitution that affects man even in the midst of his economic and intellectual and social success. Man is finding himself unregenerated in a certain part of his being, just when he has done all that he projects for himself on the plane of the earthly and the human. This is mirrored profoundly in the theatre and literature of the absurd where we find the revelation of man as a despicable reality, ignoble even in his highest aspirations, a disorientated, deteriorated being. The only honesty, the only nobility, is that of Jean Genet who openly revels in his world of extreme perversion and depravity.

In analysing this we find that while man has fulfilled a certain part of his life, while he has dedicated himself to high and noble causes, he still has need of a type of rebirth that can be provided only by some higher spiritual interpretation and inspiration of life. The men of Genet and Beckett cannot civilize mankind, cannot constructively guide its destinies, cannot inspire the loyalties needed to sustain a civilised or even partially civilised human order of life.

Yet we cannot say of our modern world either in its success or in its failure that it is without inner spiritual significance. If that were so it would be, to a large extent, living off the capital of a former spiritual vision and possibly squandering its inheritance. It might, however, also be proposed that such experiences as man is having of social anarchy and the radical absurdity of all existence are a preparatory phase, an effort at total honesty, a purifying of our illusions and thus, at

least, a beginning. A new spiritual awareness, a new religious age may soon dawn upon our world.

While all this is taking place, traditional religion, alienated from the modern world, has reached a spiritual *impasse*. It has lost much of its feeling for the genuine, for the honest. It has shown neither the intelligence nor the willingness to walk with man through this twentieth century in his splendour and in his shame. Religion has not communicated the vital spiritual nourishment and illumination needed by a suffering world.

What, then, is needed? A modern world responsive to the spiritual, a spiritual tradition responsive to the modern world. These must be mutually infolded in the common task of bringing man to his full birth as a human being. Here I would present four modern spiritual personalities who have made significant contributions to this work.

The first of these is Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), intellectually the most creative of the spiritual personalities of modern India. In his work, *The Life Divine*, he has brought the entire historical aspect of Indian tradition into the modern world of developmental time. He has decisively answered those who say that Indian spirituality has nothing to contribute to modern man. He has rather insisted that Indian spiritual traditions are fully capable of entering into the modern world of science and historical development. Indeed he shows the need of this spiritual interpretation of the higher human process if this is to have any final significance. He also indicates that the high spiritual traditions of India can no longer exist in any vital way apart from these modern developments, which are themselves manifestations of the higher spiritual consciousness of man. What is important is that a conscious realization of the spiritual nature of man's development be attained. Only then could a truly integral human experience be achieved. The political and economic, the scientific and technological, the artistic and the literary, the spiritual and the religious, are all valid forms of man's existence. All must be preserved and developed and must mutually complete each other.



A second spiritual personality is Mohammed Iqbal (1873 – 1938), a poet-philosopher whose influence has spread throughout the Muslim world. Born in a Muslim region of India he studied in Germany and at Cambridge where he came under the influence of Bergson and Nietzsche. Yet his deepest roots are in the Koran and in the Persian Islamic tradition, especially in the high humanistic spirituality of Jalal-u'd-din Rumi (d. 1231). Iqbal awakened Islam from its mystical mood of passivity derived from an excessive sense of divine control of life and from the ecstatic experience of the Sufi saints, and brought Muslim thought and social attitude into contact with the modern world of progress, science and technology. In his poetry he extols ideals of human freedom along with a devotion to God. He denounces the excessive traditionalism of the Moslem community and calls upon men to dedicate themselves to a study of the new sciences which are now altering life so profoundly.

A third spiritual personality, this time from the Buddhist world, is Daisetz Suzuki (1870–1965). He it was who brought Zen Buddhism into our twentieth century world with such impact that Zen must be considered a major element in contemporary thought, art, literature, spirituality and religion. Zen is wonderfully alive in these times. The purists who point out the differences between the ancient and contemporary Zen are quite correct; but what is considered a corruption from one point of view may well be a creative adaptation from another. The Zen of Suzuki is authentic both in its fidelity to the tradition and in its presentation to the modern world. He has made it available to modern man as a way of realizing the deepest possibilities of man's being. In a special way Zen enables man to respond to the deepest spontaneities within himself, the deepest intuitions of which he is capable. It influences the total range of human activities and has a special compatibility with our modern world, also with our scientific development, for it enables the mind to respond with new clarity to its trans-rational scientific insights as well as to its poetic insights. Along with this Zen fosters an awareness of the ultimate mystery of all things and brings man into an intimate experience of the human, cosmic and divine orders.

A fourth person who has shown the spiritual meaning of higher human process being carried on by science and our modern world is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). Of modern Christian writers he has been outstanding for bringing together the traditional spiritual and the modern scientific worlds. In a special manner he has been the first to penetrate fully into the sacral aspect of developmental time, of the entire evolutionary process. He is a modern of the moderns, a traditionalist of the traditionalists. His deepest inspiration is undoubtedly the spiritual teachings of Paul but this early spiritual vision has shone with new brilliance in the sublime interpretation Teilhard has given to the developments of our age.

From these extraordinary personalities we can easily perceive that there is both continuity and discontinuity in the movement of religion from the past into the present. This must be understood as creative newness emerging out of life-giving traditions whose vitality is by no means exhausted, but expresses itself with new vigour as mankind unfolds its full reality through the centuries. The religious possibilities of man expand as the life of man himself expands into ever new dimensions. The one requisite is that religious personalities now commit themselves to understanding and transforming this new world with the same vigour with which their predecessors understood and spiritually transformed the world of their own times.

Fordham University  
New York

Thomas Berry

# Religious Experience And Religious Languages

"Oh God, make me realize that the only way to reach you is by getting rid of you."

Meister Eckhart

## Introduction

The title of this paper is purposely ambiguous. The first part, "religious experience" is certainly meaningless when translated into English Grammar; that is, whatever I may claim or disclaim about religious experience will presuppose both that I know what such an experience is and that such an experience may be comprehended within the limits of the theoretic consciousness of language, as spoken or written. (In other words, I would be dealing then with a philosophico-theological explanation of religious experience and not with religious experience itself.) The second part of the title, "religious languages" is offered here for the first time instead of the more common expression philosophy-theology, that is, religious languages stand for the attempts made through history to guide man —dogmatically or ritualistically—to have certain definite kinds of religious experiences. In this sense I have in mind not only the philosophies and theologies of the West but also those of the East. In general the title of this paper may be read as in some way opposing religious experience to the variety of theological cum philosophical explanations of such experiences. The present market-place of religious-theological life seems to warrant this interpretation in the sense that there are many peddlers of experiences termed religious without gods —from LSD to chanting— while the God of established theologies seems to be undergoing such a constant face-lifting as to be unrecognizable even to his own cosmeticians. That man is in a crisis is obvious. My contention, however, is that while the crisis might appear from the viewpoint of organized religions as

a crisis of faith it is only a crisis of beliefs and that contemporary man is more deep in a life of faith than may be suspected or even hoped for. The *R̥gveda* 2500 years B. C. seemed to understand the plight of the man of faith when it chanted (10:151):

1. By Faith is Agni kindled. by Faith his oblation offered. Full of happiness we rejoice in Faith.
2. Just as the gods had faith even in the powerful *asuras* (devils) make this wish of mine come true for those who are generous in the Sacrifice.
3. Protected by Vayu, both men and gods increase in Faith by Sacrificing.  
Men gain Faith through the instilled desires of the heart and become richer through Faith.
4. Faith in the early morning, Faith at noon we implore,  
Faith at the setting of the sun.  
Faith, increase our belief.

Hidden in the above song poem of the *R̥gveda* lies the purpose of the present paper. Is there a way to increase man's Faith integrating his own beliefs? If we take religious experience as that undying Faith in man, is there a way for man to go deeper in his Faith by way of his beliefs, that is, not by discarding them but by integrating them? I will try to show that this is possible if the growth of man is shown to lie in establishing a dynamic relation between his languages of theology and his religious experience. To this end I will try to propose a possible theoretical model which will integrate the religious experience. This theoretic model of integration and complementarity is based not on the fact of religious experience as such but on the fact of human communication. Human communication is every effort at explanation. As long as we take explanation as standing for itself and not for something else, there is the possibility of growth as opposed to the recession of scepticism. (It is through explanation that man grows in insight and communication. But explanation, and more so theological explanation, is dead when taken as a symbol standing for something-out-there-real.)



The model of explanation and growth I have chosen is only an application of the theoretic model of the life of the *R̥gveda* as I found and explained in my book, *Four-Dimensional Man: The Philosophical Methodology of the R̥gveda* (Dharmaram Series, Bangalore, 1971). Its applicability to modern man's religious experience and modern theology will become obvious as we proceed.

### The *R̥gvedic* Theoretic Model

My choice of the *R̥gvedic* model as a theoretic model which may account for both religious experience and religious languages is based on several facts. First of all, it does not follow any of the systematic philosophical categories used normally by communities Western or Eastern and which account for much of the confusion within theological circles. The *R̥gvedic* theoretic model is based on a new methodology of context- (or intentionality-) analysis and context-dependence. In brief, the *R̥gvedic* text offers four different yet related intentionalities (or sources of meaning) which stand as the four basic *units* of meaning of human experience. Due to this relation among the different languages or sub-languages of the *R̥gveda* the whole life of *R̥gvedic* man has a definite comprehensive intentionality in the strictest philosophico-religious sense. The whole life of *R̥gvedic* man is accounted for, not only in its private but also in its social sense, and so are experience in the religious sense and the gods of certain experiences. Furthermore, it accounts for the most difficult task of man, the sacrifice of his own gods is search of the pure, unlimited, timeless experience of religion in the strictest sense.

From an epistemological viewpoint the theoretic model of the *R̥gveda* accounts for sense experience in a wider manner than other epistemologies we are accustomed to. When one considers the function of gods in religion and the function of our physical objects in the physical world one sees that they differ only in degree not in kind. That is, the degree to which they expedite and explain our dealings with sense experience. As our sensibility becomes more sophisticated so do our gods. We apprehend the gods we are ready for.

The greatest insight, however, to be found in the Ṛgvedic theoretic model is what I call the language of Images and Sacrifice. Behind every structure, every theology, every spoken or written language, there is an all-embracing image which gives philosophical meaning to the whole of human life as reflected through that language, theology or structure. It is this language of images which provides a possibility of self awareness, subjects and objects and their sequels of dogmas and inaction. The all-embracing image under which theologies operate is mostly ignored and a significant religious dialogue is made therefore impossible.

With these notes in mind I will proceed now to synthesize the Ṛgvedic theoretic model for human action and interaction.

The four basic languages (units of meaning, intentionalities) of the Ṛgveda are *Asat* (Non-Existence), *Sat* (Existence), *Yajña* (Images and Sacrifice) and the embodied (*Rta*) vision (*dhīh*). Each one of these basic languages is the accumulation of many other languages, or the result of other context-dependent syntheses. These languages are internally united through an activity within structures (*satya*) or through the activity of a radical sacrifice (*ṛtu*) to lead Ṛgvedic man to an efficient vision (*dhīh*) or an eternal/perfect action (*Rta*). Thus the activity of structuring and the activity of transcendence lead Ṛgvedic man from the sheer possibility of action (*Asat-Nirṛti*) to *Rta*, the eternal efficient act which is also immortal (*amṛta*). (From a philosophical point of view we may add that the ordering relation of these languages has the formal properties of a partial ordering. It separates three languages, *Asat*, *Sat* and *Yajña* from each other and then unites them within the embodied (*Rta*) language of Vision (*dhīh*) as the result of an internal chain of activities, *satya*, *ṛtu* and *dhīh*. The formal structure so exemplified is called by logicians and mathematicians a "non-distributive lattice" or "quantum logic.")

The Ṛgvedic intentional life culminates in the conscious efforts of the Ṛṣis to direct human acting, through the construction of formal structures towards the building of an efficient Body of Law (*Rta*) grounded on practical reason (*satya*, *ṛtu*). The condition of possibility for such a Body of Law to be humanly efficient (i. e., eternal *amṛta*, durable *abhika*, *āyu*, *āyur*



The Language of embodied (*Rta*) vision (*dhīh*) appears in the Ṛgveda as the result of the above complementary journey. The *Rta* as the embodied Law guides Ṛgvedic man in two ways: (a) as the store of all that has been rightly formed (*sukṛta*) from old (*ṛtam purvyaṃ*) and (b) as the guide-norm for a way of acting which should prove as efficacious (*ṛtasya tantuh* or *ṛtasya dhārā*): as a thread to be woven or a stream to be followed in an eternal creation which starts with man and continues with man who is the one to keep these worlds going eternally. *Dhīh* or vision, of absolute presence, is the instant flash of enlightenment which emerges as a result of sacrificing experience as structured. The unity of this power/activity appears in the Ṛgveda as a result not of rational inquiry but of an internal incitement (*su*) produced through insights and the accumulation of insights (*manah*). The new vision, the total religious experience, should in turn create a new manifestation or sublinguistic system which will keep these worlds and man's growth going eternally.

The Language of embodied (*Rta*) vision (*dhih*) appears in the Ṛgveda as the result of the above complementary journey. The *Rta* as the embodied Law guides Ṛgvedic man in two ways: (a) as the store of all that has been rightly formed (*sukṛta*) from old (*ṛtam puryam*) and (b) as the guide-norm for a way of acting which should prove as efficacious (*ṛtasya tantuh* or *ṛtasya dhārā*): as a thread to be woven or a stream to be followed in an eternal creation which starts with man and continues with man who is the one to keep these worlds going eternally. *Dhih* or vision, of absolute presence, is the instant flash of enlightenment which emerges as a result of sacrificing experience as structured. The unity of this power/activity appears in the Ṛgveda as a result not of rational inquiry but of an internal incitement (*su*) produced through insights and the accumulation of insights (*manah*). The new vision, the total religious experience, should in turn create a new manifestation or sublinguistic system which will keep these worlds and man's growth going eternally.



This, in outline, is the R̥gvedic model of human experiencing and human growth. In essence it establishes that man holds the worlds and the gods in his own hands; that it is man that makes gods in his own image and man who grows by sacrificing those images eternally. This sacrifice, however, is based on a mutual context-dependence of rival theologies and multiple interpretations. It is through the plurality that man gains not only his growth but also his salvation. How this R̥gvedic model applies to the present theological and religious situation we shall presently see even if only in a suggestive and tentative manner.

### God as a "Background Reality"

The shortest distance between a complex problem and an easy solution is via a scapegoat. In the present religious crisis the organized churches have been blamed for almost everything including religion itself. The fact of the matter is that the believer is the one that takes one simplified aspect of a theology as his religion and lies contentedly in his own sought security. It is not my intention at this point either to condemn or to absolve. The problem is complex and universal. What I will do instead is to bring out in the Western Tradition those aspects of its religion which have acted upon the believers as the Dragon *Vṛtra* of the R̥gveda: the background animal covering man's possibilities for entering into the full life of religious experience. (I am obviously forced into concrete examples to make my point. I am not saying in anyway that the aspects of Christianity I bring out are all there is to Christianity or Judaism). Now, the first point we must make is that Christianity as a message brings news from out-there, rightly interpreted by constituted authority and passed down the hierarchical ladder to the Christians at large. The Christian attitude, therefore, is already predisposed to pay more attention to the *explanation* (which is accidental) than to the *experience* which is essential. Any Westerner (forcibly of a Judeo-Christian background) will naturally be predisposed to confront any other *interpretation* of religious experience as a rival system of thought, a competing ideology, as false religion, and he may even feel satisfaction by being able to tag such rival interpretations as pantheistic, quietistic, illuministic, pelagianistic

or even escapist. Christianity, of course, shares the blame, for Christianity is a religion of revelation. A revelation communicated to man in words, in statements, and belonging to Christianity, depends to a great extent on the believer's accepting the truth of these statements. These statements have become in many ways the obsession of Christianity: an obsession with the accuracy of their transmission from the original sources, exactness of meaning, elimination and condemnation of false (different) interpretations accompanied by arbitrary and fanatical insistence on silly hair-splitting distinctions and the most obscure subtleties of theological details.

It is also true that Christianity insists on experience, the living experience of Christ which should transcend all conceptual formulations. But even here one has to be careful how one experiences; for the Christian experience is inseparable from the Mystic Christ and the collective life of the Church, the Body of Christ. To experience in Christian terms is to experience beyond the merely individual psychological level and to "experience theologically with the Church" (*sentire cum Ecclesia*). That is, the experience of a Christian must always be reducible in some way to a theological form so that it can share in, or show, it can share in, the way of experiencing of the Church. The fact of the matter is that the moment a fact like religious experience is transferred to a statement it is falsified. One ceases to grasp the naked experience and one grasps instead a form of words reducible to and verifiable through logical statements. What all this amounts to is that the believer in such goods has stopped short of religious experience and settled in the cocoon of his own sense of security based on his own correctness; a feeling of confidence that he belongs to the group of the saved, a confidence that he holds the correct view of the creation and purpose of this world, his neighbour and his own behaviour in general which is to be rewarded in the next life. On the other hand, he may prefer a way of anxious insecurity and hope created by the struggle of occasional doubts and the right answers, a painful effort to conform to the laws of morality and a desperate dependence on the Sacraments which alleviate not only his own guilt but also his weak constitution which must constantly fall and rise. For this kind of believer God, any god, is a failure,

the animal that holds him down so that he does not grow in any significant human way. With such a god who needs the devil?

The attitude described above, though based mostly on the Catholic model and certain emphasis of its doctrines is not of course all there is to Catholicism as we shall see later on, nor is the attitude exclusive of Catholicism. The point I am trying to make is that this attitude is taken historically by many believers of both East and West and corroborates the first language of the *Asat* (Non-existence) as presented in the *Ṛgvedic* model. The attitude is universal and not exclusive of any one theological tribe.

### **The Multiplicity of Religious Explanations : Religion with God and without God**

The *Ṛgvedic* model offered, through the Language of *Sat*, a multiplicity of gods and heroes needed to account for the sensory experience of the men of the *Ṛgveda*. Gods, heroes, natural powers, magic, sorcery, appear simultaneously as many different *explanations* of an *experience* which is supposedly *ekam*, One. "The poets speak in many ways of what is One only": *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti* (*Ṛgveda*, I. 164. 46). In an era of instant communication the market-place of religious beliefs is overcrowded with different doctrines explaining or trying to explain the same transcendent experience of total unity. In fact the multiplicity of explanations is so large that it is almost impossible to find a common ground, even to label those explanations under a traditional banner, unless, of course, it is done in a very artificial way. What do we mean by Christianity, for example? Christian Theology? Ethics? Mysticism? Ritual? the Roman Catholic Church? The Protestant Churches? The Protestantism of Luther, or the Fundamentalists or that of Bonhoeffer? Is Christianity the Protestantism of the God-is-dead School? The Catholicism of St Thomas? St Augustine? Meister Eckhart? The Fathers of the Church? The "pure" Christianity of the Gospels, a demythologized Christianity or a social Gospel? The list is endless. The same may be said of the multiple new attempts at reviving magic, demonology, the Hinduism of America or that

of India, the multiple schools of Buddhism all over the world, the Theravada Buddhism of Ceylon, the one of Burma, Tibetan Buddhism, Tantric and Pure Land Buddhism, the Zen of Japan or the more romanticized form of Zen of America. To try in any way to make any comparative studies among this multiplicity of explanations at this level of their phenomenological appearance is hardly possible. In fact, all one can hope to do is simply this: affirm the fact and look for their crypto-unities somewhere else. A few remarks, however, may be added before we take our own advice. The multiplicity of religious languages is a fact. It is also a fact that all of those interpretations are many ways of searching for or claiming some kind of unified, total, integral experience which most of them, if not all, name religious. The difference among the several interpretations is not so much their claims about religious experience, but rather the value they give to their interpretative tools when referring to religious experience. On account of this emphasis on the value given to their interpretative tools some of these interpretations take the form of dogma, an established God, an organized world picture, a moral ethic. The result is a return to the attitude of the *Asat* (non-growth) or sheer scepticism. As the *R̥gveda* notes in 10. 121 "What God shall we adore?" or in 8. 89. 3 "Whom, then, shall we honour?" The multiplicity of explanations seems to stand in the way of human growth... unless we go a step further and realize that behind every explanation stands the Dragon: the possibilities of man, — that it is man himself uncovering his desires, capacities and fears, that institutionalizes himself in a position of no further progress. This projection of the Dragon, *Vṛtra*, into man's own explanations will appear more clearly when considering next the Language of images and sacrifice.

### **The Language of Images and Sacrifice:**

#### **Four Fundamental Images of Western Civilization**

The *R̥gvedic* model presents *Vṛtra* as the origin of all these worlds. The gods, Soma, Indra, Agni, all come out of the belly of *Vṛtra* or are born for the destruction of the *Vṛtra*-attitude (*vṛtrahan*, of Indra in *R̥gveda* 5. 40. 1; 8. 3. 17, etc.) The death of *Vṛtra* is not accomplished in one act and for ever but had to be repeated constantly, as in *R̥gveda* 8. 89. 3



*Vṛtran hanati vṛtrahā*: let the one who has killed *Vṛtra* once keep doing it again. Furthermore, in the Ṛgvedic context of the Sacrifice (*yajña*) the images of *Vṛtra*, *Agni*, *Purusha*, *Prajāpati*, *Viśvakarma*, the Sun, etc., all interchange, or are "turned around": (*Vṛt-* or *math-*) to show their common origin. The images, archetypes, personifications of the Ṛgvedic gods become unified in the Sacrifice so that man may continue alive. Needless to say, the Ṛṣis conceived of the Sacrifice of their own images as a way to gain immortality, the perfect action, the eternity of life and it is therefore a willing sacrifice, *krīluḥ* or *līlāvatāraṇa*. This activity of Sacrificing man's own creations is the activity of *ṛtu*, the perfect action which leads to the perfect experience etc., as described earlier.

The Sacrifice of the Ṛgveda can only be understood as the unifying context within which the diversity of the previous two Languages of the *Asat* and *Sat* unifies. The language of images performs, in the Ṛgveda, this unifying function, without which the Sacrifice would have no efficacy.

Turning now to Western Civilization I will try to show how behind the multiplicity of explanations mentioned in the previous section there is a unifying Image-synthesis, a unified context within which the explanation gains not only meaning but could eventually be creatively sacrificed. (I oppose the willing sacrifice of the Ṛgveda here to the more common attitude of scepticism or destruction among many believers.)

The kind of fundamental Images I am looking for in Western Civilization are those 'all-embracing controlling images which have had organizing value for human experience, that is, Western experience.' In this sense I think there are four main fundamental images in Western Civilization:<sup>1</sup>

1. The Hierarchic Image
2. The Atomic-Machine Image
3. The Organic Image
4. The Quantum Mechanics Image

---

(1) See the "Three Patterns of Western Civilization" in *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, March - April, 1969. Vol. 25. n. 4 pp. 98 - 109.

All I can say at the moment about these Fundamental Images is that they exist and that somehow or other they organize human experience in certain areas of Western experience. Religion being, of course, one of the most important areas.

### The Hierarchic Image

The archetype of this Image is the Roman Catholic Church. One great Cosmic Administrative Scheme, in which things, man, doctrines, and nations even, *belong* to an appointed place in the hierarchy, scaled in an order of subordination. From the apex of Being (which equals God and, in many cases, the God of Being becomes the Being of God) creation, law, revelation, life, grace, descend down the ladder to all the believers. Like revelation, power and authority are all eternally present in the mind of God. The Church's function is to elucidate those eternally existing laws, truths, and values in the mind of God and pass them down through the hierarchy to man. Man has only one recourse: obedience, for things, in this hierarchical Image, do not change. They are eternally present *sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper*: as it was in the beginning, it is now and for ever.

To realize that this hierarchical image is alive and influences Western life even today, one has only to read the Encyclicals of the Popes, and the history of the Holy Roman Empire, or to study the Feudal order, the Guild systems, Aristotle's Physics (to know the part one must know the whole), the philosophy of St Thomas, or the ethics of striving for the highest level of the hierarchy to which we belong. That this Hierarchical Image is present in today's life is easy to see by joining the Armed Forces, the bureaucratic government or even the modern corporation. The order of power, authority and value is unilateral. The necessity to proceed through established "channels" shows how this Image is still operative in our lives.

In the religious stock market this period (13th-Century Europe mainly and wherever the same image is still functional) may be classified as the inflationary period of Being, and the subsequent philosophico-theologico-theoretic-conscience. This image leaves little room for Sacrifice. The word is obedience.

## The Atomic-machine Image

If the 13th Century was the period of the Hierarchic Image, the 16th and 17th are the periods of the new atomic-machine Image. This is the period of Protestantism, nationalism, democracy, capitalism, classical physics, empiricism, the rebellious individual.

The image of this period changes the relations between man and God in the following sense: there is no new need for hierarchical transmission between the two. Man need no mediator between himself and God. The spiritual atomic protestant is related to others —all others— as his equals in the face of God and needs no higher order of clergy. The atomic atoms just meet in a common place, form a congregation. Even if a certain hierarchy is at times established, in the final round it is the atomic individual soul who has the last word. The Protestant church, is in essence, the prototype of this atomic machine: a mechanical congregation of atomic spiritual atoms. In this Image reality is ascribed to the parts, the atom, the individual, not the system. Also the relations between part is only external and not constitutive. (The perfect monad, also the birth of Puritanism).

How this Image has affected Western Civilization is almost obvious. A few remarks may be added. Nationalism, Democracy, Classical Physics, Euclidian Geometry, the philosophies of Locke, Jefferson, Paine, Mill, Descartes, Bacon, Kant, etc., are all efforts to institutionalize this Atomic-Machine Image. Ethics, deprived of an external source of values, tries to read them in the laws of nature (as in physics), or to focus ethics in a psychological atomic centre where the good is the sum of particular subjective satisfactions or pleasures, as in Utilitarianism. The gods of the new Image are, in the final analysis, the individual atomic souls: law, judge and jury all in one. The Atomic-machine Image is spelled carefully in the American Bill of Rights where the sufficiency of the atomic political atom is established, while the Constitution of the United States establishes the Government which may be composed of individual, self-sufficient political wills that are arbitrated in a common territory, within the matrix of common problems.

## The Organic Image

This Image of Western Civilization affirms both the whole and the parts, yet its emphasis is primarily on the *relations* affecting both the moment they are related. The model comes from biology and is taken as a living organism. The whole depends on the parts and the parts are constitutively altered by the whole.

In religious terms it means the following: there is no transcendent theism, a character of the previous two Images. Instead we have what Dewey calls (in *A Common Faith*) a certain quality of response to shared values, and an integrity of search for intellectual and moral enlightenment. In practical institutionalization of this Image we have groups like the Humanists, the Quakers, Unitarians, Universalists, etc. The 'religious' in life is expressed in shared interests in social concerns, and in the promotion of mutual growth among nations and individuals. This new Image has influenced professional intellectuals more than the common people as can be seen in the fields of Science: Non-Euclidian Geometry, Relativity Physics, Field Theory and Gestalt Psychology and the philosophies of Pragmatism, Radical empiricism, Positivism, Analysis and Operationalism. Ethics has turned into a certain pragmatism, or contextualism under this Image, and Man has gained supremacy over the gods of the machine by immersing himself in social action, change, novelty and certain possibilities of growth.

## The Quantum Mechanics Image<sup>2</sup>

This Image is the newest in Western Civilization and has had hardly any influence on the people at large. In this Image Reality is the All, the Totality; the parts of this totality are artificially created (explanations) for purposes of linguistic communication and conceptualization. The separation is totally false to the Reality. But since this Totality cannot be apprehended in one measurement or one sub pattern of explanation, we need many subsequent measurements which contribute and relate to

---

(2) See my book *Four-Dimensional Man*, *op. cit.*, whole Second Chapter.



one another in a complementary manner. That is, the Real is never known, but one *becomes* the Real through accumulated insights and chains of insights in the complementary efficacy of partial communication.

The relation of man and God in this new Image varies completely from the previous three Images. In the other three Images the theoretic consciousness of man is supreme, either to 'know' a God-out-there, or a God-in-here (individual conscience, or an accumulation of needs and desires in the collective conscience of man, which need to be taken care of). In this new Image of Quantum Mechanics to 'know' in the above sense has no meaning. The aim is to 'become It'. The theoretic conscience is no longer the sole arbiter of man's destiny. Every explanation, every state of theoretic conscience, is only a sub-system of a larger field of action: the total activity, the real, naked experience. From theoretic conscience we pass to another type of conscience where all the partial views and insights are accumulated and which create the true experience, the experience without qualification.

This newest Image of Quantum Mechanics brings out two most significant points of Western Culture. On the one hand it seems to return man to experience, total experience, rather than the explanation of experience. As Paul Ricoeur complained: "We are forever separated from life by the very function of the sign; we no longer live life but simply designate it. We signify life and are thus definitely withdrawn from it, in the process of *interpreting* it in a multitude of ways... We are no longer engaged in a practical activity, but in a theoretical inquiry..." ("Husserl and Wittgenstein on Language", in *Phenomenology and Existentialism*, The John Hopkins Press, 1967, p. 217). On the other hand the image of Quantum Mechanics establishes man as both total experience and total communication, that is, man is all his explanations and his unique experience. He is what he builds and what he destroys, and he is both these things simultaneously. *Samsāra* equals *Nirvāṇa*. The Sacrifice is accomplished; for there are no objects to cling to, or tags to label with. One is finally home, where no one is there to ask whence one comes from.

Needless to say, it is in this Image of Quantum Mechanics that a Philosophy of East and West can be worked out. (I am hesitant to speak of theology unless the word is taken to mean just explanation without dogma. If that were possible the complementarity would be essential.)

## Religious Experience

We have finally come to the end of the journey, the Vision (*dhīh*), embodied in a Community of seers (the body of *Rta*) with the same thing in mind: a willing Sacrifice of the dogmatic servitude to the Word, to the theoretic explanation of life, rather than the naked experience of living. But living, again, involves also explanations. Man finds his liberation through their complementary dependence, the growing detachment of explanatory modes, and the growth in awareness, in consciousness, of a totality of insights, of active Vision, of Unity. This Life of religious experience is the aim of all religions and is in no way exclusive to the East, or the *R̥gveda*, or Zen. When we reach religious experience the best way is silence. To try to define it is to fall back into the game of explanation we have just tried to liberate ourselves from. Does the Christian Mystic, the Zen Master, the Sufi, Dirghatamas, experience the same thing? The question is meaningless. To put such a question implies (falsely) that a religious experience is the experience of something! Is it not possible for man to get rid, at least for once, of his theoretic conscience?

I have tried during this paper to stress the impediments which tie the theoretic conscience to itself and deprive it of the freedom of experiencing totality in a religious way. I would like to conclude by showing that Christianity, the Judeo-Christian Tradition, is also aware of this fact of direct experience and has tirelessly repeated it again and again. The Bible is very explicit in its stress on the varieties of the ways of 'knowing' in so far as they lead to direct experience, in the religious sphere, in relation to God, or to carnal contact or direct experience of another. St Paul in 1 Cor. 1:17 distinguishes between two kinds of wisdoms: the servitude of the word, and another which is at once a matter of paradox and of experience, and is outside the

theoretic conscience. To attain to this higher wisdom one must first be liberated from servile dependence on the "wisdom of speech." This liberation is "the word of the Cross" which makes no sense to those who cling to their habits of thought and is a means by which God "destroys the wisdom of the wise" (ib. 18-23). The "Cross" is the mysterious "power" coming from the "foolishness of God" and running through "foolish instruments" (ib. 27 ff.), who have completed a self-*kenósis*, self-emptying in union with the self-emptying of Christ "obedient unto death" (Phil. 2 : 5 - 11). "I live, not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal 2 : 19 - 20, also Rom 8 : 5 - 17).

To conclude this already long paper I would like to bring in two examples as my prototypes of religious experience: Christ and Buddha. Both exemplify the perfect pure religious experience and at the same time the integration of explanatory modes around them at the time (complementarity). Christ did not reject a single *iota* of the Jewish Law. He integrated the common life of Nazareth the work of a carpenter, the austerities of the desert, the dialectics of the Jews and Roman rhetoric, embodied sinners, banquets, sickness, poverty and luxury. He synthesized them all and went beyond: to the total sacrifice, unto death of himself.

Buddha also integrated the life around him: the prince, the mendicant, the yogi, the recluse in the forest, the tormentor of his own body, the austerities that brought him almost to death, the doctrines of the times, and he went beyond them all discarding nothing, or rather, he became enlightened as the outcome of his previous integration of the life around him, the institutionalized life he was familiar with. Neither Jesus nor Buddha became the pure religious experience they were without their previous labouring growth of integration.

In both cases integration ended in willing sacrifice. Both pure experiences created new worlds, new horizons, new freedoms for man. Let no theologian curtail that freedom.

# The Spirit and Orientation of an Indian Theology

Theology is reflection on faith lived in a community and discourse expressing that experience. In the long Indian tradition starting even with the *Rgvēda*, religion was a quest and all philosophical discourse centered on interpreting the experience of the quest itself. The *Rgvēda*, the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads* present what is called the *Brahmōḍya* (a short form of *Brahmaṇḍya*), a discussion on the knowledge of ultimate reality. Christian theology, if it should capture the Indian mind, must follow the spirit and orientation of these discussions on Brahman.

In the following pages I propose to discuss a possible structure of such a Christian discourse and to point out where it differs from the traditional Western theological patterns and also from the traditional Indian thought content. Structure itself is against the spirit of Indian theology, which is a constant quest for the ultimately unknowable. Hence any structure ascribed to it should be that of an open-minded questioning.

## Theological Activity

Theology is not faith, but only the interpretation of faith. Any interpretation of the ineffable should have the humility to recognize its inadequacy and the wisdom to leave all doors open for further understanding. Hence the Western traditional definition of theology as *Fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding, need not be taken for an adequate description of theology. Theology is not, at least in the spirit of the Indian quest, a progression from the obscurity of faith to the intelligibility of the *logos* but a movement from the twilight of faith to the blinding brightness of an inner vision. Hence theology does not provide clear and distinct answers to every problem but only points the way towards the comprehensive view in which all particular problems lose their relevance.



Thus the very tendency of theology as conceived in the Indian tradition is to move away from all structures and systems. It only asks what is relevant and meaningful for human life; it does not intend to construct a foundation for the large edifice of morals, worship, history, sociology and the rest. These are presupposed as the normal structure of human life from which the enquiry starts. Hence an Indian theology is not a science of God, a discussion of the existence and nature of God, but rather an opening up of the human self to the fuller meaning of the divine. Theology is not a system, but rather an activity. It is not an activity that builds up a tower of Babel rising towards heaven, but rather the digging up of the human channel through which the heavenly Ganges can descend and flow.

This spirit of Indian thought is evident even in its earliest moments of history. The horned god of the Indus valley does not try to build a kingdom of animals and men around him. Sitting with an erect phallus in the yogic posture he represents the convergence in his tranquil consciousness of the brute physical force of nature (symbolised by the horns, the animals, etc.), the procreative force of sex and the spiritual energy of asceticism. Dawn, the lovable goddess of the *R̥gveda* is daughter of the God of heaven, yet in her open comprehensiveness communicates to the Creator a share in the cosmic harmony. In continuous procreative union with him in spirit, she gives flesh and blood to all beings. Fire, the symbol of all the gods and their priests is also born of man's activity by the rubbing of two pieces of wood but at the same time is the beneficent force that brings light and energy from above. Speech is uttered by man in prayer and poem, in magic and ritual, but she is also the ultimate meaning of things, that gives name and form to every being, yet transcends all beings.

The parable explained in the *Kēna Upaniṣad* about the encounter of the gods Fire, Vayu, and Indra with Brahman is indicative of the same theological understanding. Fire the presiding deity of sight, and Vayu the presiding deity of hearing are defeated and turned back by the unknown Yakṣa. Indra the Lord of intellect also fails to discover the reality of the Visitor. Only when Uma, the goddess of wisdom, appears in mid-air and explains Brahman as *Tad Vanam*, the object of meditation and

search, does Indra come to an understanding of the reality of the Supreme Being. He then communicates that knowledge to the other gods. The senses of man and his other natural powers have to be denied first so that the real wisdom may be communicated to him from mid-air. Once this communication takes place, the senses, and the other powers of man have their function in the theological understanding. The story of the *Chândôgya Upaniṣad* concerning Prajāpati instructing Indra in the knowledge of self shows another side of the same picture. Only Virōcana the leader of the Asuras is satisfied with the common sense answer of the self being a physical image of man reflected in his material needs and pleasures. Indra on the other hand has to be led slowly through the levels of dream and dreamless sleep to the full understanding of the absolute reality.

Hence the movement of Indian religious thought is in the first instance by way of *tapas*. Once the external levels of man's existence are denied their autonomy the transcendence of the ultimate reality is perceived. But from this internal vision experience moves outwards as word. This word gives meaning and identity to the various phases of man's life.

## Structure of Indian Theological Experience

### Experience of the Spirit

An Indian theology which tries to go beyond all structures must have an open structure of perpetual enquiry. But it is not an empty openness. It is the transparency of the human self to the continuing presence of the *Paramātman*. Theology is grounded in an experience. This experience is openness in faith to the activity of the spirit in one's interior. Only by the spirit can one will and execute anything good. 'They are the children of God who are led by the Spirit of God.' Experience of this Spirit of freedom and Spirit of prayer, who expresses himself in the heart of creation with deep groaning is the starting point of an authentic theology. The Spirit is the centre and focal point of all life and experience. He is the real *tapas*, the convergence of all spiritual energy.

## From the Spirit to the Word

But this experience does not remain purely interior. It seeks expression as word. Man looks for external structures and social signs to find outside himself, what he feels within him. This is not a mere going out, but a sharing with other men who also contribute to the fuller explicitation of what is happening within. This is the dual nature of man that he does not want to remain closed up in his inner self, but wants to see it reflected a million times in other faces and other beings. He wants to encounter the divine not only within himself but also outside, in the sacrificial fire, in the altar of oblations, in the holy brook and the sacred tree as well as in the privileged moments of human history, when the divine enters the human world through what is designated as *avatār* or incarnation. Hindu tradition recounts more than a hundred *avatārs*. The divine was visualised not only in human form but at every level of life as fish, as tortoise, as boar, man-lion, the primitive diminutive man, as the jungle man, the husbandman, the country chieftain and finally as the noble King Kṛṣṇa. This is an indication of where the mystery of the Word-made-flesh comes naturally into human experience: Christ, the Word of God, is not one level or aspect of human experience but the fullness of the divine reality in the fullness of creation. In him alone the fullness of the divinity internally experienced becomes externally realised. At the same time he is also the summary of human history. The polarity of the internal experience of the spirit and the external encounter with the Word-made-flesh is transcended and resolved when one cries with Christ "Abba", Father, looking up to the one supreme Godhead. Only in the fatherhood of God is the opposition between man's internal vision and external experience brought to a unity.

Hence the Trinitarian mystery is the ground and starting-point of an Indian Theology. The internal experience of the Spirit acting in us as the *Aham* (our real 'I'), and the encounter with the world as the *Tvam* (Thou, the true Word) become unified in the supreme reality of the Father, the real *Tat*: in this unified vision one is not primarily concerned with the historical Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared at a particular point on the globe. What is important is his being the summary and sum

total of the external expression of the individual divinity, a climactic point for the exteriorisation of interior experience. For this Kṛṣṇa or Buddha may play the role of Christ. History and precision will be called for only when attention is directed to the structure of external experience located in time and space.

But human experience is not merely abstract and impersonal. It is life, the encounter with one's individual *psyche* as well as with the concrete details of daily existence in the world. Here there arises the question of divine grace. The *Paramātmān* whose presence is felt in the interior of one's being should actuate all these sundry particulars of human life. Often grace has been conceived of in Christian traditional theology as a physical reality qualifying and perfecting nature. This is an inadequate conception of the reality of the supernatural. Supernatural grace is a sharing in divine life. But nothing created and finite can give a share in the infinite reality of God. Hence the life of grace should be conceived of rather as a presence like light illuminating glass than as it is in Christian traditional theology. In the Indian tradition the supernatural is a presence endowing the human person with tranquillity and confidence. There is nothing purely secular or profane in the eyes of one imbued with grace. Every thing is an epiphany of God, who becomes the self of the soul. What the creature, the finite being contributes to the divine reality is name and form, that is the particular nature of the thing and its individuality. These do not add anything positive to the reality of the divine. The function of grace, then is to extend the divine presence to all the aspects, avenues and time-space situations of human life.

### India and Salvation History

Hence history should be an integral part of an Indian theology. It may be a paradox to say that time and history constitute the highest point and weakest link in Indian theological thought. Even from earliest times *kāla* (time) is the radical meaning of the finite world. Time is a kind of projection of eternity and itself has no reality. Its whole reality is that of being a reflection, a projection, an extrapolation of the eternal. In this



sense every creature, every particular being and every particular event find a divine meaning and purpose. It is not a project or a plan to accomplish a finite objective. The eternal has nothing outside itself to aim at. Creation is only the *līla* (play) of the Absolute. *Līla* does not seek to obtain or accomplish anything. It is the spontaneous, free, self-expression of the player. So in Indian thought the whole creation, preservation, redemption process is a system within a system, the happening in the body of Visnu who sleeps on the sea of milk. It is like a mirage or illusion compared with reality. Still it has several positive meanings: It is the pulsation of life. In the manifest body of the Supreme Being, it is the ebb and flow of time itself which endures as the shadow of the divine: God is not a static thing. He is a continuous process, subsisting activity. Happenings in time only manifest this divine dynamism. Time also shows the imperfection of the creature. Anything structured with many parts and many factors cannot remain purely static. It has to evolve within itself maintaining its internal balance. This is the function of time in the Indian religious tradition.

On the other hand the central defect of the Indian concept of time is that it is purely mythological and has no real place in concrete actuality. Time is only an idea, a model. It is not even a plan to aim at a certain fulfilment. This is the weakest element in Indian religious thought. It does not pay sufficient attention to the man in concrete space-time situations. And the whole field of concrete existence has certain inner unity. No individual thing or particular event in past, present and future can be denied without falsifying the whole. Every grain of sand, every blade of grass, every moment of the past or the future is integrally united to the whole. Every man is other men, because he carries in himself the humanity that they are. All men are just moments of the one and the same human nature. All beings are intensive actualisations of the being common to them.

This unity would be meaningless, unless it had a source and goal, a common purpose of growth and fulfilment. The on-going process of finite beings would be an aimless movement unless they tended towards a final fulfilment. This is the meaning of time and history emphasized in the Judeo-Christian view of

history. History is not merely the recounting of past events, but the very meaning of the events inasmuch as they enable us to predict the future. To be able to do this the events of humanity should be supposed to be moving ahead with a definite plan. Christian revelation places the central point of this plan in the humanity of Jesus Christ, concretely situated in a definite point of history. This concreteness is not a matter of indifference to faith. Man located in concrete space and time should find the unity and meaning of his existence in the concrete historical situation. Thus Jesus of Nazareth coming in the fullness of time, born of a woman, at a definite place, is the summary and full meaning of human history because he is Christ the Son of God who is able to bring concrete time into contact with eternity. Hence the Christian experience completes the Indian concept of time. The Indian tradition looks on time as the shadow of eternity. Christian view brings the eternal into concrete time and gives history its direction and purpose. Christology is essentially the incarnation of the Word in the concrete situation of time.

But one has to bear in mind that the individual time-place details of Christ's incarnation are important not for their particularity but for their comprehensive character as embracing all moments and aspects of history. Born in time, and having lived in a particular portion of history, Christ transcends time. Jesus Christ is "yesterday, today and for ever". So the whole of secular human history feels the impact of Christ's incarnation. It is, in a way, transformed into sacred history; the whole of creation becomes an epiphany of the divine sonship. On the one hand all creation is a *lila*, a phenomenon, an external manifestation of the creative Word proceeding from the Father. On the other hand the human race and the rest of creation become incorporated under the headship of Christ. Through the incarnation, everything becomes the body of the Son of God. So the whole of human history can be viewed as the life-story of the cosmic Christ.

### **Church, the Worshipping Community**

In this cosmic vision of the incarnation the Church of Christ appears in the right perspective. She is not a mere institution to dole out to men the merits acquired by Christ. Nor is

she an amorphous crowd of believers. She is the fullness of him who fills all things. Here the Indian and Western views of community have to be synthesised. In the Hindu view all men are manifestations of the one Self. Kṛṣṇa the *Avatār* is the model for all men. Kṛṣṇa is every man and every man in a sense is Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, Buddha is the model of the man who has attained enlightenment. In a sense every man is potentially a Buddha. The Western view on the other hand places the emphasis on the organised state of the community. Each one has a definite place in society and a definite function to fulfil. Each one is unique; no one can replace any one else. This uniqueness of the individual seems to be missing in the Hindu caste system.

Humanity is an organic body, the body redeemed by Christ the head. The true vision of the Church is that of the authentic human family reconstituted under the second Adam, Christ. Each man is a member of this body and has a definite role to play in it. At the same time Christ is present in every man; each man is a moment in the life of Christ; hence each one has to be an epiphany of Christ. As Christ worships the Father so does every man actualise in his own life the one sacrifice of Christ. Everyone is a branch grafted on to the one fruitful Vine that is Christ, in order to bear fruit from him and for him. The Church is the people of God making the pilgrimage to eternity under the leadership of Christ. At the same time everyone constitutes the one Mystical Body of Christ, growing to the stature of the God-man.

### **Sacraments, the Sacralisation of the World.**

This growth in Christ is a continuing process going on to the end of time. This again can be viewed from two angles: From the Indian side it can be conceived as a gradual conquest of the profane world step by step, element by element; stone and water, oil and incense, fruit and flower are taken out of the world to be consecrated to the Deity present in creation. From the Christian side it can be viewed as the immanent sacredness of the world secured by the redemptive death of Christ and being made manifest through all its varied elements. On the one hand

the sacraments assume water and oil, and bread and wine as well as every aspect of human communication into the service of the redeeming act of Christ. Sins are forgiven, defects are cleansed and sickness healed, through the saving presence of the redeemer. On the other hand through the sacrifice of Christ the whole world is already saved and sacralised. The sacramental presence of Christ only manifests in particular situations and human events the sacredness already achieved. Everything appears as an integral part of the sacrifice once and for all accomplished by Christ.

### **Sacramentality of Death.**

Nowhere else does this sacralisation process in Christ appear more significantly than in the experience of death. Death is often looked upon as a tragedy, the end of life, the determination of one's future as eternal happiness or as eternal misery. On the other hand the Hindu view of death implies a continual re-birth into another life with a perpetual change of body and mode of life. Death in Christ is the end of the pilgrimage, the termination of one's earthly existence. It is also the transition from death to immortality. It is the supreme point when one passes from the darkness of suffering to the fullness of light in the heavenly home, from the unreality of one's individual isolation to the reality of community in Christ. The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick proclaims that the sufferings of this individual member are part of the one saving sacrifice of Christ. As the supreme moment of one's life-sacrifice death appears as the removal of veils that obstruct one's vision.

### **The Uniqueness of the Indian Theological Approach**

An Indian Theology should try to integrate the two viewpoints of East and West. Age old Indian tradition is famous for its capacity for assimilating other differing viewpoints in a comprehensive outlook. Looked at from the angle of the Absolute Self every particular outlook appears as a partial epiphany of the Real. The Indian conception is also practical and integral both from the point of view of the Spirit manifesting itself in the cave of the heart as well as from that of the external Word



of the Gospel that is announced from the outside. The supernatural is not something imposed on man from outside but is only the manifestation of the inner life lived in God. Here Christ appears as the converging point of man's inner aspirations and in human history as Jesus of Nazareth living in Palestine at a definite point of time. Man who seeks the fulfilment of his own humanity finds that fullness in the organized community of men gathered together in Christ. It is the sacredness of one's existence and of one's body that is actualised and expressed in the celebration of the sacraments. The experience of the immutable reality of life within one's self transforms the tragedy of death into a *Pascha*, a passing over into the world of light and immortality.

In this comprehensive vision there is no opposition between self and the world, between subject and object, I and Thou, the sacred and the profane, spiritual and material, life and death. All are unified in the life of Christ experienced within oneself.

### **The Uniqueness of the Content**

In this comprehensive view care should be taken that the newness of life brought to the human race by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not lost sight of. The key to the whole vision is Jesus Christ, God and man unified in the same being. Christianity is essentially Christ. This Christ is not an invisible being, but Jesus of Nazareth, our own flesh and blood, the focal point of concrete human history. Without him the world is still inimical to the human self, without his sacrifice there is no guarantee that the deep wound of humanity is healed. Without his all-comprehensive headship, there is no way of imagining that the human family divided within itself is brought together. He alone is the one way that leads to the invisible Father.

### **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion I have to say that this is not a scheme to sell Christianity to the Hindus. This is not a missionary technique. Those who find it difficult to reconcile the experience of their inner selves with Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, may not

be inclined to accept this scheme either. This is intended for the Indian Christians who have to live their Christian faith in the context of the Indian religious tradition. Conversion is not one-way traffic, demanded only of the non-Christian. The Christian has first to be converted to the way of experience of the Hindu and of the Buddhist, before he can ask his Hindu or Buddhist brother to share the message of salvation he bears for all men.

John B. Chethimattam

# Ecumenism Today

## A Brief Survey of the Actual Working and Future Orientation of Ecumenism

Today there is a vague general feeling among Church leaders that Ecumenism is now at a dead end. Perhaps the rosy expectations of the pioneers of the Ecumenical Movement that the Church of Christ would soon become a unified little flock with a single Shepherd and a single sheepfold, have proved impossible to realize in our world of religious pluralism and individual religious freedom.<sup>1</sup> But this does not at all mean that Ecumenism has failed or that it is dead. What has actually happened is that its context has considerably changed, its perspective widened, and its activities expanded to cover a vast area where evaluation of success or failure is rather difficult. Ecumenism in its restricted sense as the dialogue between the Church bodies or *Oikoumene* of Christendom now looks rather inadequate and even irrelevant in view of the urgent need for dialogue between the different areas of conflict that a Christian encounters in his daily life, namely between Christian faith on the one hand and science and technological progress on the other, between Christianity and the so-called non-Christian religions of the world, between those who believe in the spiritual values of life and those who dedicate themselves to the solution of the material problems of human life. On the one hand utopian expectations of a quick resolution of all

- 
- (1) cf. Ernest Lange. "Malaise in the Ecumenical Movement. Notes on the Present Situation", *The Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971) 1-8; "Crisis in Ecumenism?" *Clergy Monthly* 35 (1971) 3-4. R. Rousseau "Is Ecumenism still Relevant?" *Am. Eccl. Rev.* 1970. Y. Congar "Ecumenism in Search of an Identity", *Concilium*, April, 1970.

differences and conflicts and of the realization of a monolithic unity have faded. On the other hand Ecumenism has today come of age and has become more conscious and confident of the tasks ahead of it.

### **Ecumenical Encounter between Churches**

The Ecumenical movement started under the prophetic inspiration of pioneers like C. Brent, N. Soderblom, J. Mott and W. A. Visser't Hooft. From the beginning its primarily inner goal of the spiritual union of all Christians was rightly emphasised by Paul Couturier and others. Church leaders on the other hand tended to lay the emphasis on the visible union of all Christians. For Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI this was clearly the reunion of all separated Churches with the Church of Rome, while for the leaders of the World Council of Churches (W.C.C.) the aim was a certain loose federation of all Christian Churches in a single world body.

The dramatic element in the Ecumenical Movement in recent times was provided by Pope Paul VI with his highly publicized pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1964 and the kiss of reconciliation with Athenagoras I, the Ecumenical Patriarch. This was followed up by a "plan of love" proclaimed simultaneously in Constantinople and Rome in 1967 on the occasion of the 19th centenary of the martyrdom of SS Peter and Paul. Paul VI in his message read at Constantinople by Msgr. Willebrands on July 25, 1967 said :

"We are inspired by the firm will to do all that is in our power to hasten the day when full communion will be reestablished between the Church of the West and of the East, so that all Christians may be reconstituted in unity.... After a long period of division and of mutual misunderstanding the Lord has given us to rediscover ourselves as sister Churches."

Then Patriarch Athenagoras visited the Pope and on October 28, 1967, they gave out a common message in which "they rejoiced about the fact that their meeting contributed to make their



Churches discover themselves as sister Churches." In June 1968 the IV Pan-Orthodox Conference held at Chambesy (Geneva) made special mention of "the contacts and manifestations of fraternal love and reciprocal respect between the Orthodox local churches and the Roman Catholic Church."<sup>2</sup>

In this Ecumenical approach emphasis has been placed very much on personal visits and contacts. Father Duprey of the Roman Secretariat for Christian unity visited the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople in March 1969 and Metropolitan Melito visited Rome in June 1969 and again in February 1970. As a result a common commission was set up by the two Churches for publishing their mutual correspondence. At the same time there have been a number of official visits between the Secretariat for Christian Unity and the Bishops of the Greek Orthodox Churches of Moscow, Rumania and Bulgaria, as well as of other oriental Churches like the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Armenian Church in Russia, the United States and Canada. Fathers Hamer and Long of the Secretariat visited the separated Oriental Churches of Kerala too.<sup>3</sup> These exchanges of personal visits between ecclesiastical dignitaries of the various churches was climaxed by the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Ecumenical Centre of the W.C.C. in Geneva on June 10, 1969, when he participated in a common prayer with non-Catholics "as a brother among his brothers."<sup>4</sup>

The spirit and aim of all these visits and return visits between Churches was perhaps best expressed in a joint statement published when the Armenian Catholicos Vasken I accompanied by several bishops of his Church paid an official visit to Rome on 8-10th May, 1970:

---

(2) *Proche Orient Chretien*, 1968, p. 175.

(3) cf. P. Lebeau S. J. "Point de vue sur l'actualité oecumenique", *Nouvelle Revue Theol.* 93 (1971) 167 - 179.

(4) *Docum. Cath.* 67 (1970) 890

"Unity cannot be realized unless all, pastors and faithful, seek truly to know each other. In order to achieve this (the Pope and the Catholicos) exhort the theologians to dedicate themselves to a common study in order to deepen their knowledge of the mystery of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the revelation made in him. Faithful to the tradition handed down by the Apostles and the Fathers and at the same time conscious of the demands of a world which seeks God in the new developments of our age, they can open new ways which will enable them to surmount the existing divergences and lead their churches to a unity more perfect in the profession of their faith before the world." <sup>5</sup>

From all these encounters between Churches two conclusions became clear: (1) This search for unity cannot be a partial affair but should be rooted in the whole life of the Church, lest it should become sterile. It should embrace every aspect of Christian life, prayer, mutual aid in spiritual needs, and common efforts to solve the problems of the world today.<sup>6</sup> (2) The dialogue in charity between Churches cannot be clearly distinguished or separated from a theological dialogue. Dialogue in love is by its very nature a discourse on faith shared in common by the parties and should therefore be really a theological activity.<sup>7</sup> These two clear conclusions point to the two lines on which Ecumenism had to develop, namely theological dialogue among the Christian churches and dialogue of action among men of our age of all persuasions.

---

(5) *Ibid* 515-516

(6) cf. Joint Statement of Pope Paul VI and Catholicos Vasken I, *Doc. Cath.* 67 (1970) 515-516

(7) cf. Inaugural address of Metropolitan Melito at the IV Pan-Orthodox Conference at Chambesy, June 1968. *Doc. Cath.* 67 (1970) 887

## Doctrinal Dialogue and Ecumenical Encounter with Protestants

The Catholic Church has no insurmountable or serious doctrinal difference with the Oriental Churches in general, while, on other hand, a number of theological points come in the way of a real union with the Protestant churches. It is in this area that the Ecumenical Movement itself faces a serious danger to its very functioning and meaning. As Dr Visser't Hooft said in the Central Committee meeting of the W. C. C. at Geneva in February, 1966, and as Dr E. C. Blake repeated at the Conference of Heracleon in August 1967, the Ecumenical Movement is rooted in Sacred Scripture and in the unity of Revelation around the Person of Christ. But today some deny, in the name of Biblical scholarship, the unity of the Bible and contest the unity of Christology. So the unity of the Church and the very need for Ecumenism are called into question. But this is a common danger for all Christian churches and it has evoked an ecumenical response in the form of joint study groups for examining fundamental problems like the nature of the Church, of authority, of the Eucharist and of the apostolic ministry. Here instead of the Churches facing each other in a sort of confrontation they are exploring together the Will of God revealed in Christ. A W.C.C. Roman Catholic Joint Working Group has been functioning since 1965 and has published three reports of its working.<sup>8</sup> The urgency and scope of this study are clearly set forth in the third report:

If on the one hand the scandal of disunity is sharper and the task of overcoming our confessional differences becomes more imperative, on the other hand it becomes clearer that we are faced with the question of how to interpret the Gospel today so that we may respond more faithfully to God's call to give witness to him in a way which can be effectively heard by the world.<sup>9</sup>

- 
- (8) 1st report *One in Christ*, 1966 no. 2. pp. 173-85; 2nd report *One in Christ*, 1967 no. 4. pp. 501-13; 3rd report *One in Christ*, 1971 pp. 281-294
- (9) *One in Christ*, 7 (1971) 282

After the Upsala Conference in 1968 the Department of Faith and Order of the W. C. C. has accepted nine Catholic theologians as its members with full rights. But on account of the wide spectrum of beliefs held by the different members of the W. C. C. it is difficult to reach any doctrinal position subscribed to by all of them. Hence the common activity of the W. C. C. and of joint study groups of the Catholic Church has been confined to common general areas like the authority of the Bible, Worship, the meaning of catholicity and apostolicity, observance of the week of prayer for Christian unity, and the facing of common mission problems.

Deeper doctrinal discussions have been held between Catholics and individual Protestant Churches like the Lutherans and Anglicans. A Conference of Lutherans held at Nemi near Rome in 1969 and again in 1970, studying "Gospel and Law", laid great stress on Catholic-Lutheran cooperation. In the 5th Conference of the World Federation of Lutheran Churches held at Evian, 14-24th July 1970, Cardinal Willebrands spoke paying full tribute to the personality of Martin Luther.<sup>10</sup> A joint commission of Catholics and the World Council of Methodists met at Malta in 1969 and studied the condition of the Christian Ministry today; meeting again in Lake Junaluska in the United States it continued its investigation into the problems of the Eucharist, Marriage, and the Christian family.<sup>11</sup>

The Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission appointed by Pope Paul VI and Archbishop of Canterbury soon found a great deal of agreement in almost all doctrinal matters, especially on questions of Authority, the Eucharist and the Ministry.<sup>12</sup> The agreement is evidently less than total; still, "within the disagreements and agreements many lines of convergence have already appeared."<sup>13</sup> The wide range of agreement is

(10) *Doc. Cath.* 67 (1970) 761-773

(11) P. Lebeau S. J., *op. cit.*, p. 172

(12) It met for the first time, 9-15 January 1970 at Windsor and for the 2nd time at Venice, 21-28 September, 1970. See *One in Christ* 6 (1970) 228-230; 7 (1971) 256-281

(13) *One in Christ*, 7 (1971) 264



clear from a statement of the joint preparatory commission issued at Malta in 1968:

Both Communions are at one in the faith that the Church is founded upon the Revelation of God the Father, made known to us in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, who is present through the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and his Church, and is the only Mediator between God and man, the ultimate authority for all our doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

Yet when this radical unity of Christian churches is spelt out in concrete terms there is less than unanimity. When Pope Paul VI visiting the W. C. C. at Geneva in 1969 said: "Our name is Peter," he was emphasizing the need for unity of authority in the Church founded by Christ. The statement evoked a cold reaction from the Protestant leaders who jealously guard the autonomy of their individual churches. But as L. Vischer remarked they have no definite idea how to express concretely the universality of the Church.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly today there is a great deal of common agreement between the Churches regarding the sacramental and sacrificial character of the Eucharist. The Catholic Church permits the reception of Communion by a member of another Church from a Catholic priest provided the non-Catholic professes faith in the Eucharist, and is unable to approach a minister of his own communion. In similar circumstances a Catholic is permitted to ask for communion from a validly ordained non-Catholic minister.<sup>16</sup> But this is only providing for the spiritual need of individual Christians and is not a sign of *koinonia* among Churches. Common reception of Communion between Churches can come only when full unity in faith and worship is established, because sharing the same Eucharist is the expression of the fullness of the *koinonia* already existing. But short of this full intercommunion

---

(14) *Ibid*

(15) *Doc. Cath.* 66 (1969) 698

(16) cf Vatican Decree on Ecumenism n. 8; and Directory *Ad Totam Ecclesiam* n. 55

may it not be permitted to limited groups and individuals of different Churches who work and live together to express their actual unity in Christ by sharing the table of the Lord? This point is now widely discussed.<sup>17</sup>

### **Ecumenism in action.**

The important area where Ecumenism becomes a vital need is in the witness of the Church of Christ to the world. People generally are little concerned with the niceties of theological discussion handled by experts and professionals. The main purpose of the Church is communication of the Revelation of God "patterned after its dialogue character... handed down as 'kerygma'".<sup>18</sup> Hence God's truth has to be related "to the locale in which it is being proclaimed." Today theological jargon has suffered a "monetary crisis" and has become worthless paper money to a good number of our contemporaries. "Our talk about God is pious prattle or ideological fantasy if it is not suffused with the concrete experience of practical reality."<sup>19</sup>

For this reason today greater emphasis is placed on practical ecumenism or ecumenism in action than on merely theoretical discussions. In every country a number of experiments are being carried out in schemes of ecumenical cooperation.<sup>20</sup> In the United States of America since 1968 the Medical Mission Sisters have joined the Protestant Division of the Overseas Ministry; Confraternity of Christian Doctrine works in agreement with the Division of Christian Education, and Catholic Relief Services closely collaborates with Church World Service in the Overseas

---

(17) cf. *N. R. Th.* 92 (1970) 767-771; 1052-1054; P. Y. Emery. "Confucianisme?" *Verbum Caro* 91 (1969) 47-68. cf. also *Ibid* 4-30. Maurice Villain S. M. "Ecumenical Understanding and the Theologian", *Concilium* 44 (1969) 92-95

(18) cf. Heinz Zahrnt. "Ecumenical Understanding and the Theologian", *Concilium* 44 (1969) 99 ff.

(19) *Ibid* p. 101

(20) cf. Reports on "Ecumenical Experiments" in different countries, *Concilium* 44 (1969) pp. 133-177.

Ministry. In St Mark's Parish in Kansas City, Missouri, four pastors from four different Christian churches work together in the same parish sharing everything short of the Eucharist. In the United States, England, Germany, France, Belgium and several other countries, great efforts are being made to bring ecumenism to the "grass roots" level through programmes like "Living Room Dialogues", "The People Next Door" and similar inter-Church discussion groups. Almost everywhere efforts are being made to produce an Ecumenical Bible, a common prayer book and hymnal, and a common creed. Inter-Church Bible services are quite frequent.

Perhaps it is on this level of practical activity that the weakness of present-day ecumenism is most apparent. As John Macquarrie complains ecclesiastical officialdom has monopolised and institutionalised Ecumenism.<sup>21</sup> The common people and especially the young people have not been sufficiently involved in it.<sup>22</sup> The reason for this is that ecumenism has been too utopian and idealistic in the past and has not taken into account the hard realities faced by local communities with all the historical residue of passion and prejudice that cannot be got rid of overnight. A second reason for the present deadlock in ecumenical activity is that ecumenism has only lately come into the life of the Churches and has not been fully absorbed into the bloodstream of Christian life. A third reason for the apparent failure of ecumenism is that ecumenical experience itself is difficult to translate into simple direct programmes. The Christian life is "tied up with responsibility and failure, conflict and reconciliation within the primary human groups, the family, the neighbourhood, etc."<sup>23</sup> The most important reason, perhaps, is that once the meaning and scope of ecumenism is made clear it cannot be restricted to mere collaboration between Christian Churches but has to be extended to men of other faiths as well.

---

(21) John Macquarrie. "Secular Ecumenism", *Amer. Eccl. Rev.* 1969 p. 288

(22) *Concilium*, 1. c. pp. 176-177

(23) cf. Ernest Lange. "The Malaise in the Ecumenical Movement" 1. c. p. 6

## Ecumenism in a Wider Sense

This need for taking Ecumenism in a wider sense was emphasized by Vatican II which in its document on Non-Christian Religions acknowledged them as working with (not against) the divine plan for the salvation of all men, and tried to spell out the unique contributions of certain major World Religions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. Christian theologians are now moving a step forward and stating that "the future of Christianity does not hinge on the visible re-conversion of the 'de-christianized masses' in parts of Europe and the Americas. . . . The Church becomes herself only by moving forward in a historical process which is eschatological and therefore unrepeatable." The dialogue with world-religions should lead to something more than tolerance.<sup>24</sup> As a group of theologians declared, who met at Zürich in May 1970 to evaluate an earlier meeting of world religions sponsored by the W. C. C., the dialogue with non-Christians is full of opportunity today, since thereby "Christians can now, as never before discover the meaning of the Lordship of Christ and the implications for the mission of the Church in truly universal context of common living and common urgency."<sup>25</sup>

Hence, the most active area of Ecumenism today is this encounter between the Christian Churches and the Non-Christian religions. Centres and institutes for the study of world religions are springing up everywhere. Christian theologians are making an earnest effort to study the redemptive plan of God in Buddh-

---

(24) Eugene Hillman C. S. Sp. *The Wider Ecumenism*. Herder and Herder, New York: 1968, pp. 15-16. cf. Dom Sylvester Houedard OSB. "The Wider Ecumenism" *The Aylesford Review* 7 (1965) n. 2; Frederick J. Streng *Dialog* 6 (1967) n. 2 "Is there a Gospel in Non-Christian Religions?"

(25) "Christians in Dialogue with Men of Other Faiths" *Intern. Rev. of Mission* 59 (1970-71) 382-391



ism<sup>26</sup>, in Hinduism<sup>27</sup>, in Islam<sup>18</sup>, and in other religions. Vatican II as well as the W. C. C. meeting at Upsala in 1968 have created a certain confidence that recognizing the uniqueness of each of the world religions will not in any way deny the uniqueness of Christianity and the one mediatorship of Christ.

## Conclusion

Without indulging in any fanciful optimism we can say that Ecumenism has now come of age. It is fully conscious of the difficulties in its path. But it also realizes the tremendous possibilities now open to it in the wider context of the encounter of all religions in Christ.

- 
- (26) Richard H. Drummond "Toward Theological Understanding of Buddhism" *Journ. Ecum. St.* 7 (1970) 1-22
  - (27) cf. the many contributions of Raymond Panikkar, J. A. Cuttat, Swami Abhishiktananda, Bede Griffiths OSB, and others on the subject. e.g. R. Panikkar "Advaita and Bhakti: Love and Identity in a Hindu-Christian Dialogue" *Journ. Ecum. St.* 7 (1970) 299-309; S. J. Samartha *Hindus vor dem universalen Christus*, Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1970; E. Cousins "The Trinity and World Religions" *Journ. Ecum. St.* 7 (1970) 476-498
  - (28) Ismail Ragi A. al Faruki "Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or Dialogue", *Journ. Ecum. St.* 5 (1968) 45-47.

## Contributors

DR JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM, C. M. I. is Professor of Theology at Dharmaram College, Bangalore, and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, New York. He holds doctorates in Theology and Philosophy. His two books *Consciousness and Reality* and *Dialogue in Indian Tradition (Patterns of Indian Thought)* have been recently republished by Geoffrey Chapman, London and by the Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York.

DR RAYMOND PANIKKAR holds doctorates in Theology, Philosophy and Science. He is the author of more than a dozen books on the encounter of Christianity with other world religions, among which special mention must be made of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* and the recently published *Trinity and World Religions*. Born of an Indian father, but brought up in Spain, he has a special love for Indian tradition and generally resides at Benaras. He is visiting Professor at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. for the Spring semester every year. He has recently accepted invitation to teach in the Department of Religious Studies in the University of California.

REV. ROBLEY WHITSON who taught theology for seven years at Fordham University is now Professor at Hartford Theological Seminary. His numerous publications include *Ecumenism and Mysticism*. The present article is a chapter from his book entitled *The coming Convergence of World Religions*, being published this Fall by the Newman Paulist Press of New York.

DR THOMAS BERRY is Associate Professor of Theology at Fordham University, New York. After taking his doctorate from the Catholic University, Washington D. C., he spent an year in China learning Chinese and Chinese religions and later he did special studies at the Columbia University. His publications

include books like *Buddhism, Five Oriental Philosophies, and Religions of India.*

DR ANTONIO T. DE NICOLAS is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. He spent several years in India and later took his Ph. D. from Fordham University. His book *Four- Dimensional Man, the Philosophical Methodology of the Rgveda* has been recently published in Dharmaram College Studies Series, Bangalore.



